



NCSE | National Center for School Engagement

**Peer Victimization in Schools:
A Set of Quantitative and Qualitative Studies of the
Connections Among Peer Victimization, School Engagement,
Truancy, School Achievement, and Other Outcomes**

By

**Ken Seeley, EdD
Martin L. Tombari, PhD
Laurie J. Bennett, JD, PhD
And
Jason B. Dunkle, PhD**

National Center for School Engagement

July, 2009

**An initiative of The Partnership for Families & Children
450 Lincoln Street, Suite 100, Denver, CO 80203
303/837-8466**

www.schoolengagement.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary.....	2
Chapter One – Literature Review	
Investigating Peer Victimization in Schools: A Review and Critical Analysis of the Literature.....	13
Chapter Two – Study 1	
Peer Victimization, Student Engagement, Student Achievement and Attendance: A Structural Equation Model Of the Interrelationships.....	46
Chapter Three – Study 2	
How the Bully-Victim Relationship is Experienced by Two Sets of Victims: A Qualitative Study of Some Young Adults Who Overcame Being Bullied, and Some Who Did Not.....	172
Chapter Four – Study 3	
Coda: What Teachers Have to Say About Bullying and What To Do About It.....	247
Chapter Five – Discussion	
Implications of the Three Studies and Recommendations.....	266
References.....	282

PEER VICTIMIZATION IN SCHOOLS:
A SET OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE STUDIES OF THE
CONNECTIONS AMONG PEER VICTIMIZATION, SCHOOL ENGAGEMENT,
TRUANCY, SCHOOL ACHIEVEMENT, AND OTHER OUTCOMES

Executive Summary

Summary and Discussion of the Studies

These authors designed and completed three studies to explore the connections among the variables of bullying/peer victimization, school engagement and the school outcomes of attendance and achievement. We also addressed some of the limitations in previous research efforts dealing with these topics. Study 1 was a quantitative study whose purpose was to develop a predictive/causal model that would explain the relationships among peer victimization, school attendance, school engagement and school achievement. In this study we used direct measures of school attendance and achievement and a previously validated measure of school engagement. Study 2 was a qualitative study of the school experiences of bullied children. From this study we planned to gain insight into school instructional, interpersonal, and structural factors that affect the victimization-attendance connection. Study 3 was also a qualitative study of teachers' experiences with efforts to ameliorate the impact of school victimization.

**The Quantitative Study: School Engagement Mediates Between Being a Victim
And Being a Truant**

The underlying premise of the quantitative study was that school truancy serves as a gateway to numerous negative outcomes for today's youth: dropping out of school,

onset of drug use, engaging in criminal activity, and the like. Our conversations with youth in a truancy diversion program (see Appendix B) posited some connection between students being truant, and their experiencing victimization or bullying from their peers in school. The existing research literature suggested that such a connection may be less than direct – it could be difficult to establish that bullying somehow directly “causes” truancy – but that an indirect connection, mediated by one or more other factors, might be shown to exist. A short-term longitudinal study was undertaken, in which 1000 students were surveyed in the fall and the spring of their 6th grade year. Two sets of questions were asked: one set pertaining to whether the students were engaged in school (behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally), and a second set pertaining to whether students were subject to actions by their peers that fall within the definition of bullying. Using structural equation modeling, the data collected were analyzed to determine the connections, if any, between being victimized, being engaged in school, and the outcomes reflected in school records of attendance and achievement (measured by grade point average).

What was learned from this analyzed data set was this: while bullying does not directly relate to truancy or to school achievement, a statistically significant relationship can be shown where the effects of bullying; victimization; can be mediated by the factor of school engagement. In other words, being bullied may not be a direct cause of truancy or low school achievement. If, however, bullying results in the victim becoming less engaged in school, that victim is more likely to cease attending and achieving; if the victim can remain or become engaged in school, his or her attendance and achievement are less likely to be effected.

If, as the quantitative study appears to show, school engagement acts as a protective factor between being bullied and being truant, what has to happen for that engagement to occur? What does school engagement actually mean, under these circumstances? Why do some students manage to be engaged in school, and then thrive after bullying, while others cannot seem to connect to school?

The First Qualitative Study: Schools Can Mitigate the Ill Effects of Bullying

The qualitative study delved more deeply into what it is that keeps bullied students engaged in school and away from succumbing to negative outcomes such as truancy and criminal activity. A retrospective study was employed, using extreme sampling techniques: one group of young, high-achieving advanced placement (AP) students in a suburban high school and a second group of young men incarcerated for a variety of crimes were surveyed to determine whether they had been bullied by their peers in grade school. Those with the highest cumulative scores on the bullying scale from each group were interviewed in depth about their having been bullied, their experiences with school generally, and what they perceive as having brought them to this particular point in their lives. The interview protocol was designed and the interview transcripts were analyzed using three different conceptual frameworks: the dimensions of the school itself (*e.g.*, its curriculum and pedagogy, structure, community, administration, and overall intentions/aims), the relationships between school and society (in particular, the bullying observed by the study participants to occur in society), and the interplay between public and private concerns in bullying situations (specifically, the public

school's difficulties grappling with bullying as it arises within largely private relationships between and among its students).

What we learned from the rich and moving stories told by these young people breaks down into two categories: what schools currently do that helps and hurts bullied students, and what schools could (and, we suggest, should) give to victimized students that they deeply need. Schools help bullied kids by engaging them academically and/or in extracurricular activities; and by providing them with caring adults who support them and model positive behavior. Schools hurt bullied students by changing the school structures from more engaging learning environments at the elementary level to less engaging environments at middle school and high school levels. These changes tend to distance the students from caring adults, dilute effective behavioral supervision, and change instruction from a differentiated and interactive pedagogy focused on individual student needs. In bullying and victimization at school, these structural changes result in a failure to intervene in bullying (or to assist or support its victims) early on when it first occurs; and by making victims feel even more isolated from the rest of the school community. Also emerging from the interview data were three things that bullied students need from their schools: 1) a safe place of refuge and belonging (where they can feel both safe, appreciated, and challenged in a constructive way); 2) responsible adults who can support and sustain them, and provide them examples of appropriate behavior to follow; and 3) a sense of future possibilities beyond the immediate dangers from the bullying that surrounds them, so as to persuade them that staying in school despite those dangers promises better things to come. In other words, schools should be providing a safe and nurturing learning environment, adults who show they care, and a path to a

productive adulthood. This allows bullied students to overcome bullying effects. What the students generally agreed does not work to help them survive their victimization intact are superficial anti-bullying programs, engrafted on to existing curricula almost as an after-thought, which might afford lip service to school districts' responsibilities for addressing bullying concerns, but are usually ineffective and viewed by students as "tedious" or "lame."

The above-described findings led these researchers to want to hear from another group besides the students who suffer from bullying: the adults to whom the victims look to support and sustain them in the school setting. An opportunity arose to obtain insights from teachers who deal with bullied students, and a third, smaller study resulted.

What Teachers Say About Bullying in Their Schools

During the course of putting this report together, one of its authors taught a graduate seminar to masters and doctoral students on Bullying and Qualitative Research. The students were all teachers at various levels in diverse K-12 classrooms. At the end of the seminar, the teacher/graduate students were assigned to submit short papers proposing either an intervention plan or a research design addressing bullying within their schools. Their papers turned out to be a rich source of data on these teachers observations and opinions about how bullying should be (and often is not being) handled in their schools' classrooms, cafeterias and corridors.

The strand of the standard bullying definition relating to power imbalances deeply resonated with these teachers. To them, the power inequities in the school setting, which observed by students in the outside world of family and friends and then emulated in the

classroom, are key to bullying being sustained. The sense of isolation that many students feel at school only increases their vulnerability to bullying by their more powerful peers.

The antidote to problems of power and isolation, in the view of these teachers, is found in fostering a sense of community in school. To create community, teachers advocated the teaching of caring. First, students should be taught how to care for themselves. To accomplish this, the teachers argued for engaging kids in the stuff of school – school work, extra-curricular activities, and planning for a productive future so that students can be fully engaged with their whole selves in their present. Second, students should be taught how to care for others. The best ways for this to occur are through teachers modeling caring behavior, and offering school-based opportunities for students to mentor other students. Finally, students should be taught how to care for their community. Community service projects, both inside and outside the school itself, provide an excellent path for teaching students how to care for the world around them. An added benefit from such projects is that they often remove students, albeit briefly, from existing, classroom-based power relationships into new unfamiliar environments where all students feel vulnerable, and in which mutually supportive collaborations can ensue allowing bullies and victims alike to see themselves and their classmates in a new light.

The teachers described two ways in which caring and community-building are frustrated. The first involved school administrators who “sweep bullying under the rug” – ignoring it or downplaying its significance – in order to maintain reputations or to avoid confrontations. The second involved what the teachers labeled “bullying-in-a-box” or “bullying-in-a-binder.” These are attempts by school districts and building leaders to

address bullying issues by handing teachers some pre-fabricated anti-bullying curriculum (in a box or a binder) and directing them to teach its components in addition to the regular curriculum. The teachers viewed these types of anti-bullying interventions as a distracting and ineffective substitute for substantive leadership/district support for what is really needed to combat bullying: a caring school community in which individual students are meaningfully challenged and supported by the adults around them and each other.

What We Can Do About What We Have Learned: Study Implications and Suggestions

The implications from the above-described studies can best be understood when contrasted with a recently published report, prepared for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, entitled “Effectiveness of Programmes to Reduce School Bullying: A Systematic Review” (Ttofi, Farrington & Baldry, 2008). This meta-analytical report reviewed evaluations of 59 school-based anti-bullying programs in various countries, including the United States. The only evaluations included in the study were those “comparing an experimental group who received the intervention with a control group who did not” (p. 6). It also excluded evaluations relying on measures other than student self-reports, largely of their perceptions of the level of bullying before and after the program interventions took place (or, with control groups, of their perceptions of the level of bullying at two points in time).

The report found that “overall, school-based anti-bullying programmes are effective in reducing bullying and victimization” (p. 6), and that the following program elements were most important (pp. 6-7):

- parent training
- information for parents
- school conferences
- disciplinary methods
- improved playground supervision
- classroom rules
- classroom management
- cooperative group work
- work with peers
- videos

The report found that “the programmes worked better with older children” (p. 7) and recommended that anti-bullying programs should therefore “be targeted on children aged eleven or older, rather than on younger children” (p. 72). The report also cautioned that such programs “were less effective in the USA” than in other countries studied (such as Sweden and Norway).

Essentially, the Swedish report argues for discrete programs (such that effects can be cleanly tested), parental involvement, a focus on older children (from whom reliable self-reports are more easily obtained than from younger children), and an emphasis on rules, discipline, and supervision. When these elements are operative, bullying numbers go down in a measurable way.

How the Swedish Findings Connect to the Findings in this Report

The Swedish report operates from an assumption – shared by many in the field of bullying prevention and in the social sciences generally – that a problem can be most effectively addressed when its parameters can be cleanly measured and where experimental and control comparisons are clear. These “evidence-based” programs can only be established if the operable factors and variances can be sufficiently narrowed so that they can be measured to produce the evidence. A program failing to meet such strict

conditions is probably suspect. Thus, the important design “elements” of the different school-based programs covered in the Swedish report focused heavily on management, rules, supervision, parental training and conferences, the showing of videos, and the self-reports of older children: all things that can be measured using the scientific basis of experimental design as the quality standard..

From our studies we have learned, instead, that bullying is a messy thing, not clear or easily limited at all. It is not that the learning from the three studies comprising this report disagrees with the meta-analysis of the Swedish findings. This report provides new evidence for a fuller picture of the complexity of bullying and victimization and their correlates. Obviously parental involvement is a good thing. Increased supervision, improved classroom management and more even-handed discipline were referenced by students and teachers alike as necessary school improvements. But bullying itself, however, rooted as it is in the power inequities of our society and the out-of-school experiences and observations of every child attending school, is not as simply and easily eradicated through discrete and measurable school-based programs as the Swedish report might suggest.

If one of the reasons that we care about school bullying is its ultimate outcomes – not just whether raw bullying numbers decrease, but whether the ever-present victims of bullying go on to college or to crime – then we must look beyond narrow programs that produce statistically significant numbers, and toward broader (and, unfortunately, less easily measurable) efforts striking at the heart of the victimization experience of these students. What can a child who is repeatedly and severely harassed by others do to overcome this experience in order to continue to attend school, graduate, and ultimately

thrive? If a school cannot eliminate bullying altogether – and even the “best” programs in the Swedish report are associated with a decrease in victimization of 23% at most (Ttofi et al., 2008, p. 7), leaving 77% of the bullying presumably in place – what can the schools do to help and support that victimized child?

Recommendations

Based upon the findings of the three studies of this report, and the extensive literature review, we make the following recommendations:

- 1. Focus on engagement.** Schools and their leadership should redouble their efforts to reach each child through heightened focus on schools’ primary educational mission – to create the conditions for learning for all students-and thereby help the bullied children in their midst become productive adults.
- 2. Model caring behavior.** Teachers and administrators need to be trained in how to model appropriate caring in the school community and this should be developed and made part of teacher and principal licensure programs and continuing professional development curricula.
- 3. Offer mentoring programs.** Mentorship of specific students should be made part of the job description of every adult working in the school setting. Students should be given opportunities to mentor and lead other students – in the classroom, in cooperative learning situations, and/or as part of service learning programs.
- 4. Provide opportunities for community service, in and out of school.** Schools should take the initiative to involve students in community service both in and out of school as an integral part of building school community and counteracting the isolation and pain of bullying.
- 5. Re-examine the transitions in the school structure.** Schools should seriously explore the possibility of eliminating or at least facilitating the transition from elementary to middle school and middle school to high school, by eliminating transitions such as creating K-8 schools or develop transition programs with a range of services from universal to intensive so as to better acclimate students to this abrupt shift in their educational environments.
- 6. Start early, with the young ones.** Schools should direct resources towards recognizing and intervening in school bullying in the early grades, including

teacher and administrator training in how to recognize the difference between bullying and playful banter.

7. Resist the temptation of “bullying-in-a-box.” Schools should avoid narrow, quick-fix anti-bullying programs, and instead focus on sincerely engaging students in the real work of school: by providing them with challenging work to do, by giving them adults who support them and model caring behavior, and by pointing the way to the future possibilities of productive adulthood.

Conclusions and Comments

Bullying and victimization of students in schools have received a great deal of deserved attention. The more we learn about creating safe and civil learning environments the more we understand that from the student’s perspective it is a complex social-emotional phenomenon that plays out differently on an individual level. We began this study thinking that we would find direct relationships between bullying and truancy and delinquency. What we found and reported above in brief form, we believe is more important than just correlates among variables. The power of victimization to distance students from learning can be overcome by schools adopting intentional student engagement strategies to create positive learning environments that produce academic achievement.

The full report provides great detail on how we got to these recommendations and conclusions. The literature review is timely and extensive to help program designers and researchers understand where we are and far we need to go. The quantitative study using Structural Equation Modeling provides evidence among the key factors that point to the power of engagement for victims of bullying, and the lack of causative relationships between bullying and truancy. The qualitative studies look at different perspectives on the problem to help explain some of the “whys” behind the quantitative data and the

findings reported in the literature. The report is designed to be used as reference material as well as a comprehensive view of the problem to inform those seeking program designs or researchers finding interesting new topics to study.

Chapter One – Literature Review

Investigating Peer Victimization in Schools: A Review and Critical Analysis of the Literature

Introduction

Educators acknowledge that a lot of children are bullied in schools and that they must do something about it. Over twenty states have laws compelling schools to have anti-bullying programs. In response to these laws, schools across the country have adopted bully prevention curricula, trained staff to implement them, and given instructional time to do so.

Although United States schools have tried to manage peer aggression for decades, the focus on bullying began in earnest in the 1990's, triggered by reports of student suicides, brutal peer beatings, and school shootings. Many mental health professionals, educators and legislators believed that we could prevent these social calamities by “stopping” bullying. Thus, for nearly two decades, social scientists and school practitioners have been engaged in the public health equivalent of a Manhattan Project to understand the causes of bullying and discover solutions.

Our review highlights the two most prominent threads of this research – what we call the “bullying strand” and the “peer relationship strand.” The former strand, as we point out, has focused on five areas: definition, prevalence, typologies, impacts, and

interventions. While much progress has been made in these areas, there are still many unresolved concerns related to the meaning of certain bullying constructs (e.g. power imbalance), the measurement of bullying, and the theoretical model that underlies this research.

The “peer relationship strand” of bullying research represents a nearly two decade effort to tease out the most important factors underlying peer victimization and its impact on children’s success or failure in school. As our review points out, this largely quantitative research program has identified important factors that “mediate” the relationship between school victimization and school outcomes while also studying attributes that relate to why certain children are picked on by others. Nevertheless, this strand of research also is fraught with unresolved problems related to the definition and measurement of constructs, and the absence from its statistical models of important contextual factors such as teacher-child relationships.

What are some of the findings of these two research strands that are covered in depth in our review? First of all, researchers agree that the essential features of a bully-victim relationship are:

- An intentional aggressive harmful act that is
- Repeated a number of times and that is
- Part of a relationship characterized by an imbalance of power between the bully and the victim.

Estimates of the extent of bully-victim relationships in school settings vary depending on whether you ask the bullies or the victims themselves to report about their experiences, or whether you ask others (teachers, parents, peers) to identify who are the bullies and the victims:

- Self-reports suggest that about 25% of school children are part of the bully-victim relationship.
- Peer-reports suggest about 10-15%.

The psychological and behavioral consequences for the victims involved in this relationship are more damaging than are those for the bullies:

- Although some of the early bully studies showed that bullies experience low self-esteem, depression and loneliness, more recent studies suggest that the psychological profiles of bullies are relatively benign, or that they are high-status, popular students.
- Victims on the other hand, are at risk for low self-esteem, low school engagement, school avoidance, lower school achievement, learned helplessness, and depression.

In initially reviewing the bullying literature, we have been repeatedly struck by one main point: while bullying is widespread, the horrific consequences (suicides, shootings) of bullying that have driven interest in the subject are relatively rare. It is clear from nearly two decades of research on peer victimization that not all victims are harmed. Some develop psychological problems, withdraw from classroom activities, avoid school and fail to achieve, while others do not. Why do some students who have been victimized by bullies suffer negative consequences, leading them to disengage from school or do damage to themselves and others? Why do other students who have been victimized, instead, become well-adjusted and successful?

The peer victimization research that we have reviewed is largely silent on these questions despite the efforts of some very talented and dedicated scientists. We are convinced that their methods have something to do with their inability to tell us much about the actual experiences of victimized children. Explaining victims' experiences in context and in depth might reveal why some of them react negatively, and others do not.

As we point out in our review, most peer victimization research identifies demographic characteristics like gender, and psychological constructs like peer rejection, depression, emotional adjustment or academic self-competence, builds “measures” of these variables, and tries to isolate their unique contribution to some desired educational outcome like school achievement. The problem with this “variable by variable” approach to the study of peer harassment is that it takes the victim out of the context in which he or she was victimized. In other words, this reductionist approach takes the psychological trait out of the context of the whole person, the whole person out of the context of the classroom, and the classroom out of the context of the school and community.

These concerns point up the need to study the consequences of peer victimization in a less reductionist manner and in a school context. Thus the final section of our review examines the relatively few qualitative explorations of how the bully-victim relationship is experienced, identifies deficiencies in this research, and recommends additional research of a qualitative nature to enrich our understanding of why some children suffer short and long term consequences from peer harassment and others do not.

This review, by organizing two decades of peer victimization research around two thematic strands, highlighting both its conceptual and methodological deficiencies, pointing out the gaps in our understanding of what victims experience, and recommending new research directions, will be a useful tool to social scientists and practitioners interested in the study of school bullying and its aftermath.

Some Prefatory Stories

The Columbine Video Creator.

A local newspaper interviews a young man responsible for creating a controversial, violent, interactive video game based upon the April 20, 1999 Columbine school shootings (Crecente, 2006).¹ He tells of his growing up in rural Colorado and having been persistently physically and socially bullied while in school, beginning as early as kindergarten. He got “pushed every day,” he was “ostracized not once, not twice, but years in and out,” and, as a result, his “understanding . . .and perception of humanity [was warped] in some almost irrevocable way” (Crecente, 2006, p. 4A).

In the wake of the Columbine shootings, however, the then high school sophomore took steps to ““forge himself” into a new person” (Crecente, 2006, p. 4A.). He began learning martial arts. Invoking one of his personal heroes – Stanley Kubrick, who died a month before Columbine erupted – he got involved in making films himself. He began seeing a therapist. He focused on his school work, eventually graduating with a 4.0 average. His classmates voted him “most likely to succeed.” He ultimately went to and graduated from an Eastern college, where he studied filmmaking. After college, he returned to Colorado, and started his own production company.

Despite the persistent, harrowing bullying encountered in his earlier school days, he is now an accomplished young man.

¹ It was the horrific incident at Columbine High School, as will be further seen below, that triggered the ongoing spate of research interest in school bullying in the United States. See (Espelage & Swearer, 2003); (Vossekuil, Fein, Reddy, Borum, & Modzeleski, 2002).

The Luncheon Speaker

At a brown-bag luncheon sponsored by a non-profit foundation, a tall and somewhat stocky high school girl, hunkered down in a black hoodie and sweatpants, comes to speak to us. For Anna, as we will call her here, family life has not been smooth sailing; we learn that there was abuse and there was death infusing the story of her single parent family background. She does not want to dwell on those aspects of her life, however. Instead, she tells the tale – first haltingly, and then with more conviction – of the demeaning bullying that she suffered at the hands of her peers throughout middle and high school. She was ostracized, restricted to only certain bathroom stalls to avoid “contaminating” the others, slurred and degraded in graffiti, pushed or shoved on her way to school. It was constant and unrelenting. She even felt driven, on occasion, to demonstrate that she was not entirely powerless by bullying those weaker than she – in the hopes of escaping her own victimization. She thought of suicide, and of harming her tormentors.

Anna relates how she found little help from the responsible adults in the school. Teachers and counselors ignored what was going on unless they were directly told. Then they seemed only to make matters worse, more degrading, as they carelessly made public her private travails. Her mother, though clearly loved and loving, had little power in bureaucratic school setting and repeatedly failed in her faltering efforts to be heard by school staff.

But then Anna tells the story of how she has been able, in effect, to turn her life around. She confided in a Girl Scout leader who then began to take a continuing interest in her. She had a caring mother at home. She found allies in two friends – one a disabled

girl, who herself was the subject of peer bullying – the other a popular girl, who one day discovered Anna’s hidden worth. She pushed herself to get involved in school activities like student council, the prom committee, and grass-roots bullying prevention efforts. She started to stand up for herself and for others, and thereby began to empower herself in front of her peers. Anna gained confidence – and the victimization receded. She is definitely a survivor, and appears now to be doing quite well for herself.

Nonetheless, she notes what she feels is the reality of her past situation and that of other victims: “everyone is going to bully someone – it’s not going to stop – it’s what our society is.”

The Dinner with Dignitaries

A “Stop-Bullying Summit” was convened in Denver in June of 2006. The night before the day-long Summit, a dinner was hosted by the organization sponsoring the Summit and by a Colorado non-profit foundation. The dinner brought together 40 academicians and practitioners in the field (teachers, school administrators, law enforcement, bully prevention specialists, etc.) to have a discussion, lubricated by good food and wine, about issues of note. The dinner was kicked off by asking the assembled dignitaries a series of questions.

The first question was how many of the attendees had gone to grade school. Every hand was raised. The next query was how many went to college; again, the response was overwhelming. When asked about advanced, graduate degrees, all but a handful responded in the affirmative. Then, switching gears slightly, an example was proffered of a definition of the term “bullying” that is accepted by many researchers (Smith, Cowie, Olafsson, & Liefvooghe, 2002): (a) intentional harm-doing (b) carried out

repeatedly over time (c) within an interpersonal relationship characterized by an imbalance of power. The “harm-doing” can take a number of forms, including direct, either physical (through actual contact or mean gestures) or verbal (such as name-calling or taunts), indirect (such as intentional exclusion from a group), or even cyber-bullying. With this definition under our collective belts, the dignitaries were asked the following: how many of them were bullies or bullied when they were in grade school?

Of this well-educated, highly accomplished group of adults, virtually every one of them raised his or her hand.

The Columbine Anniversary

Just before the seventh anniversary of the Columbine shootings in April of 2006, six middle school boys in a tiny town outside Anchorage Alaska and five high school boys in Riverton, Kansas were arrested for plotting and preparing to carry out their own school shootings on April 20. News reports attributed the motivation for these students’ actions to “revenge for being picked on,” or a history of having suffered “bullying” at the hands of other students (Kabel, 2006; Lee, 2006).

Not all victims of bullying thrive.

* * *

Research on Bullying and Peer Victimization

Two different strands or lines of research dominate this field (Boivin, Hymel, & Hodges, 2001; Olweus, 2001). The first stems from intensifying interest in the phenomenon of bullying in schools; the second arises from a more-longstanding interest in peer relationships (peer acceptance, rejection, victimization) and their impacts. Each will be addressed in turn.

The Bullying Strand of Research

The Bullying Strand: Why Research Bullying?

To place this line of research into context, it is helpful to understand what prompted researchers to look into the phenomenon of bullying in the first place. The inspiration appears to have grown from two sources: what might be characterized as a concern with “bad things happening” as an outgrowth of bullying behavior, and a concomitantly evolving focus on children’s fundamental rights.

“*Bad things happening.*” The sparks that galvanized researchers into exploring the whys and wherefores of modern-day school bullying originally flew from the traumas of school suicides and shootings (Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Smith, 2004; Smith & Brain, 2000). The researcher considered to be the father of modern bullying research is a much-published Scandinavian scholar named Dan Olweus, who began studying bullying in the 1970s and 1980s. He became interested in bullying as a result of a spate of school suicides in his native Norway; the children who killed themselves had apparently been brutally tormented by their peers (Olweus, 1993). A succession of school suicides caused by school bullying led to research activity in this area in Japan as well (Smith & Brain, 2000).

In the United States, it was literally a trigger (as well as a number of explosive devices) that set off research interest into the bullying field: the Columbine shooting rampage (Espelage & Swearer, 2004). Reports that the two perpetrators had felt themselves to be persecuted by their peers created a groundswell of media attention, state and local policy-making, legislative enactments, and research on school violence

generally and bullying prevention in particular. Even the United States Secret Service managed to get into the act: it turned its vaunted profiling and threat assessment skills to the problem of school violence, producing an extensive study of 37 incidents of targeted school violence over 25 years (Vossekuil et al., 2002). One of its top ten findings was that “[m]any attackers felt bullied, persecuted or injured by others prior to the attack” – indeed, an oft-quoted statistic is that 71% of the attackers studied had felt bullied by their peers (p. 21). See, e.g., Espelage & Swearer, 2004, p. 2. It should be noted that the “*n*” for the 71% statistic was only 29 – not a sample from which powerful inferences might be drawn. Moreover, while the Secret Service researchers noted that some attackers had experienced bullying and harassment that was “long-standing and severe” and in at least one case “appeared to have been a factor in his decision to mount an attack at the school,” they nonetheless were not able “to determine the exact proportion of attackers who had been victims of bullying specifically.” They stressed that “not every attacker in this study felt bullied” (Vossekuil et al., 2002, p. 21).

The right to be safe in school. Also prompting research activity into the phenomenon of school bullying has been a qualitatively different impetus – the conviction that children have a fundamental right to feel safe and secure in their schools, and that bullying (even if it does not rise to the level of provoking retaliatory violence) violates that right (Smith, 2004). The immediate genesis of this conviction lies less in reaction to the spates of bully-provoked violence, and more in a growing appreciation (especially among European, Australian, and Canadian researchers) for the human rights of individuals in the international community (Rigby, 2006). As noted by Smith (2004), a prominent British researcher in the field:

In a twenty-first century climate of increasing concern for rights of individuals and groups, whether due to race, sex, disability, religion, or sexual orientation, the right to be educated without suffering from victimisation has resonated with professionals and the public... This has interacted in a synergistic fashion with the growth of research. (p. 98)

Olweus (2001) has similarly argued that:

It is a fundamental democratic or human right for a child to feel safe in school and to be spared the oppression and repeated, intentional humiliation implied in peer victimization or bullying. No student should be afraid of going to school for fear of being harassed or degraded, and no parent should need to worry about such things happening to his or her child. (pp. 11-12)

More recently, Greene (2006), citing to both the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, has asserted that:

From a human rights perspective, then, not only can all forms of bullying be understood as human rights violations, but it is also clearly incumbent upon schools to provide social programs that remedy such infractions and the underlying norms and situations that facilitate the violations. (p. 71)

Thus, it has been both a fear of cataclysmic things happening in a school setting brought about by bullying behavior on the one hand, and a sense of empathy for the plight of the victimized child and a concomitant drive to call on the discourse of rights to try to address that plight on the other, that seems to have elicited the surge of research about bullying in recent years.

The Bullying Strand: What Have Been the Foci of Research?

The bullying literature has by and large focused upon five areas: definition, prevalence, typologies, impacts, and interventions.

Definition. While we all may believe that we know what “bullying” is when we see it, crafting an operational definition of the concept so that its extent and impact can be

studied with any rigor has not been easy. Indeed, as recently as 2004, researchers acknowledged that “[t]here is no universally agreed definition of bullying” (Rigby, Smith, & Pepler, 2004, p. 5). Nonetheless, a general, albeit “fuzzy” (Smith, 2004, p. 98) consensus around a workable bullying definition appears to have emerged over time.

Under this definition, bullying consists of:

- intentional aggression or harm-doing by the bully against the victim;
- that occurs repeatedly over time; and
- that occurs within a bully-victim relationship characterized by an imbalance of power between the two (Elinoff, Chafouleas, & Sassu, 2004; Espelage, Bosworth, & Simon, 2000; Nansel, Overpeck, Pilla, Ruan, Simons-Morton, & Scheidt, 2001; Olweus, 1993, 2001, 2003; Smith et al., 2002).

Even this agreed-upon definition casts a wide net. Much ambiguity remains. For example:

Does ‘intentional’ simply mean an intention to do the act that is aggressive (without necessarily understanding the consequences), or a full intention to hurt the victim? Is the aggression, or hurt, judged by an outsider, or does it rely on the perception of the victim? Does repetition mean more than once, or over some (unspecified) duration of time? Can imbalance of power be inferred from the subjective perception of the victim, as well as from more objective criteria such as strength, or number of bullies? (Smith, 2004, pp., p. 98)

Research in the field has not come up with hard and fast answers to any of these questions.

Adding further complexity to the definitional conundrum is a continuing proclivity upon the part of researchers to broaden the scope of “harm-doing” activities to include an ever-growing list of behaviors (Elinoff et al., 2004). Initially, in the 1980’s, bullying was thought to consist primarily of direct physical (e.g., hitting) and verbal attacks (e.g., threats, teasing or name-calling); now the definition seems to embrace many other behaviors, including indirect (e.g., spreading rumors) and relational (e.g., social

exclusion) forms of bullying (Smith, 2004). Many recent studies take care to highlight the different types of bullying, in an attempt to tease out variations in their impacts (Boulton, Trueman, & Murray, 2008; Bradshaw, Sawyer, & O'Brennan, 2007; Hoglund, 2007; Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2007; Jacobsen & Bauman, 2007; Klomek, Kleinman, Schonfeld, & Gould, 2008; Nylund, Nishina, Bellmore, & Graham, 2007; Terranova, Morris, & Boxer, 2008). Even “cyberbullying” – defined as the misuse of “technology to harass, intimidate, bully, or terrorize another person” (Franek, 2005-2006, p. 39) has recently been added to the mix (Bhat, 2008; Gillespie, 2006; Hinduja & Patchin, 2008; Juvonen & Gross, 2008; Raskauskas & Stoltz, 2007). The upshot is that the term “bullying,” while operationally defined in the literature to some extent, leaves a great deal of room for differing understandings of what is actually occurring under its rubric.

Prevalence. The initial aim of many bullying studies has been to establish a rate of “prevalence” for bullying and victimization within the particular populations studied. The determination of bullying and victimization prevalence rates has been said to provide “a foundation for an understanding of the bullying problem” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2095). It can also be used as a basis for comparing the varying extent of a problem both between different populations, and over time in the same population (so that changes stemming from interventions, for example, might be assessed) (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

The concept of prevalence was engrafted upon the body of bullying research from the field of epidemiology. As noted by Solberg and Olweus (2003):

In epidemiology, prevalence usually refers to the number of persons with a defined disease or condition existing at a particular point in time (point prevalence) or within a specified time period (period prevalence or cumulative

prevalence) relative to the total number of persons in the group or population 'exposed to risk.' (p. 239)

These authors translate this epidemiological concept into the victimization realm by defining prevalence as the “percentage of students in a school or other meaningful unit who have been exposed to bullying/victimizing behavior by other students with some defined frequency within a specified time period” (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

In theory, this translation (from pathology to bullying) should work. In practice, the going is not so smooth, for a number of reasons. First of all, bullying bears little similarity to a “defined disease or condition.”² As discussed above, bullying is not easily or precisely defined, and scholars in the field are by no means unanimous in their understanding of the reach of the term. Each prevalence study seems to focus on a different population, employ a different time period over which to measure victimization occurrences, use different levels of frequency or repetition as the cut-off points for determining whether bullying has or has not occurred, and include different kinds of behavior within its bullying definition (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).

Second, even if the bullying “condition” were precise in its definition and scope, researchers do not agree as to the best way to gather data so that a prevalence estimate might be made. Differences in measurement methodology abound. For example, some researchers believe that the best way to inquire as to whether a child has been bullied is to ask directly (e.g., “how often have you been bullied within the last 30 days?”), with an accompanying definition of what “bullying” entails (Solberg & Olweus, 2003). Others argue that using the baggage-laden term “bullying” may subjectively influence (or

² As will be further discussed below, victimization bears more resemblance to a relationship – you cannot have bullying without both a bully *and* a victim – than to a disease or condition appearing in an individual.

“prime”) a respondent and thereby affect the validity of the response (Espelage & Swearer, 2003); these researchers instead ask about whether certain behaviors or conduct has been experienced or observed, without affixing the label of “bullying” thereto.

Researchers also differ about from whom to gather the data about occurrence of victimization. Some go with self-report questionnaires (asking the child him or herself whether he has been bullied (Nansel et al., 2001)); some prefer peer nominations (asking classmates who within the classroom unit has been bullied (Perry, Sara J, & Perry, 1988; Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004)); others employ teacher nominations (asking teachers who within the classroom unit is subject to victimization (Roland & Galloway, 2004)). Prevalence estimates derived from these different sources, however, may simply not be comparable one to another (Solberg & Olweus, 2003).³

Finally, the different prevalence studies have been conducted in a variety of countries, cultures and classroom contexts. Before 2001, most prevalence studies were conducted in Europe, Canada, Japan and Australia. Language and cultural differences make it difficult to compare prevalence rates derived from student populations from different countries (Smith et al., 2002; Wolke, Woods, Stanford, & Schulz, 2001). Studies are also all over the map as to the ethnic and economic make-up of the populations from which the prevalence estimates are derived (Graham & Juvonen, 2002). Finally, different prevalence studies look at all different age/grade levels of students,

³ Studies comparing these different quantitative data sources conclude that whether self-reports, peer nominations, or teacher nominations garner the most useful or valid results depends largely on the purpose for which the data is being gathered (e.g., (Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2001; G. W. Ladd & Kochenderfer-Ladd, 2002; Pellegrini, 2001). For the purpose of generating prevalence estimates, however, all three types appear to be used, even if the resulting estimates are not wholly comparable.

from kindergarten to elementary (Wolke et al., 2001) to middle school (Espelage et al., 2000), to high schools and even college (Duncan, 1999) .

As a result of these study variations, a scan of a number of representative articles⁴ either deriving or describing prevalence rates reveals an astonishingly wide range of prevalence estimates of victimization in the literature, ranging from as low as 5% (Roland & Galloway, 2004) to as high as 80-90% (Espelage & Asidaio, 2001). In the first major U.S. prevalence study, surveying a staggeringly large sample of 15,686 students across the United States, Nansel et al (2001) determined that 29.9% of the sample reported moderate or frequent involvement in bullying – either as a bully (13%), as a victim (10.6%) or both (6.3%). The authors of this very broad study acknowledged that their “research provides a foundation for an understanding of the bullying problem. However, it is insufficient to guide intervention and policy development” (Nansel et al., 2001, p. 2095). Indeed, given the tremendous inconsistency – in both methodology and results – among prevalence studies, about all that can be concluded is that a substantial quantity of children are the victims of bullying; we just cannot say for certain how many, or to what use these studies might profitably be put.

Typologies. Bullying does not ever simply involve an individual. Someone must be the perpetrator, someone must be the victim. Some children, from time to time, switch roles and go back and forth between being bullied and bullying others. Other children

⁴This selection of articles resulted from a search, using the terms “bullying” or “bullied” in the title, of the Academic Search Premier/Complete data base from 2001 to 2009 (Bowles & Lesperance, 2004; Elinoff et al., 2004; Espelage & Asidaio, 2001; Espelage et al., 2000; Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Griffin & Gross, 2004; Kokkinos & Panayiotou, 2004; Nansel et al., 2001; Olweus, 2003; Pepler, Craig, Connolly, Yulie, McMaster, & Jiang, 2006; Peterson & Ray, 2006b; Roland & Galloway, 2004; Schafer, Korn, Smith, Hunter, Mora-Merchan, Singer, & Van der Meulen, 2004; Seals & Young, 2003; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Solberg & Olweus, 2003; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Wolke et al., 2001; Woods & Wolke, 2003).

just stand by and watch. Much of the literature in the bullying realm devotes itself at least in part to creating typologies of those involved in bullying relationships (Finnegan, Hodges, & Perry, 1998; Griffin & Gross, 2004). Authors attempt to tease out and describe characteristic traits inherent in each role, with an eye towards providing tools to adults to identify those susceptible of being bullies or bullied so that appropriate interventionary steps might be taken.

The literature's bullying typology generally divides into four categories: bullies, victims, bully-victims (also known as aggressive or provocative victims), and bystanders.

Bullies are described as having been "exposed to harsh or aggressive child-rearing practices...and inconsistent parental discipline strategies" (Griffin & Gross, 2004, p. 384). Their parents' "child-rearing techniques...include: coercive parenting..., parental hostility, a lack of warmth and cohesiveness, exposure to marital conflict, mother's permissiveness for aggression, and physical abuse" (Unnever, 2005, p. 155). They are "often characterized by impulsivity and strong needs to dominate other people ... they have little empathy...[and] they are likely to be physically stronger than...the victims" (Olweus, 1995, p. 197). Some authors believe that bullies have low social skills and low self-esteem (O'Moore & Kirkham, 2001), while others assert that they have high social intelligence and think quite well of themselves (Vaillancourt, Hymel, & McDougall, 2003). Bullies are said to be disliked by their peers (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005); they are also said to be popular, high-status, and to have a greater ease in making friends than other children (Dijkstra, Lindenberg, & Veenstra, 2008; Jones, Haslam, York, & Ryan, 2008; Langdon & Preble, 2008; Nansel et al., 2001).

Victims come from “families that tend to be over protective and sheltering [and that] become overly involved in their children’s activities” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 104). Child-rearing techniques to which they are subject include “intrusive, overprotective parenting..., intrusive parental psychological control..., and coercive power-assertive parenting” (Unnever, 2005, p. 155). Victims’ parents are often characterized by the literature as overly “enmeshed” (Unnever, 2005, p. 155). Male victims have over-protective mothers, whereas female victims experience maternal rejection (Finnegan et al., 1998). Victims are described as “anxious and insecure...cautious, sensitive, and quiet..., [and with] a negative view of themselves and their situation” (Olweus, 1995, p. 197). They have “poor self-esteem, few friends as a source of emotional support, and higher rates of depression and anxiety” (Griffin & Gross, 2003, p. 386).

Bully-victims, a smaller subgroup (Griffin & Gross, 2003), seem to experience the worst of all possible worlds. These are the children who “both bully others and are bullied themselves” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 106). They come from “troubled homes,” with parents who are “inconsistent (overprotective and neglectful) and sometimes abusive” and “low in warmth and...parental management skills (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 106). Of all the groups, aggressive victims receive the least amount of parental involvement and support (Unnever, 2005). They “are often hyperactive and have attention problems” (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005, p. 105). They have “low self-esteem, high neuroticism...serious deficits in problem-solving abilities” and “view themselves as more troublesome, less intellectual, less physically attractive, more anxious, less popular, and unhappier” than other students (*id.*). They are “impulsive with

elevated levels of dominant, aggressive, and antisocial behavior,” “have episodic aggressive outbursts,” and are often disliked and rejected both by peers and teachers – some of whom “believe that aggressive victims actually deserve the rough treatment they get” (Unnever, 2005, pp. 154-155).

Bystanders are the students “who witness the bullying but do nothing to stop it” (Salmivalli, Kaukiainen, & Voeten, 2005, p. 467). While researchers have not gone to the same lengths to profile or tease out common traits for the bystander as they have for the other three types – no rooting around in child-rearing techniques, no prying into their psychopathology – they have been paying increasing attention to the role played by these children “who are seen as pivotal in either promoting or ameliorating violence” (Fonagy, Twemlow, Vernberg, Sacco, & Little, 2005, p. 317). Salmivalli et al (2005) focus on the bystander as a way to try to stop bullying from happening at all:

Trying to make the bully behave differently rarely leads to a permanent change. Thus, the idea is to affect the behaviour of the bystander...It has been shown that although anti-bullying attitudes [among bystanders] are common..., few students actually express such attitudes or try to intervene in bullying...On the contrary, many students act in ways that encourage or maintain the bullying, taking on the participant roles of assistants or reinforcers of the bully. Other students, so-called outsiders, withdraw and pretend not to notice what is going on. Fortunately, there are also defenders who give support to the victims. (p. 467)

That there are substantial variations in the bystander role has been recognized by Olweus (2003), who has created a model called “The Bullying Circle,” listing six different roles played by students other than the actual bully and the victim in “acute bullying situations:” (1) followers/henchmen, (2) supporters/passive bullies, (3) passive supporters/possible bullies, (4) disengaged onlookers, (5) possible defenders, and

(6) defenders of the victim (p. 14). Similarly, Salmivalli (2001) has developed her own four categories of bystanders: assistants, reinforcers, defenders, and outsiders.

The notion behind the stress upon categories of bystanders is that school bullying is collective in nature, based upon social relationships in the group setting, and sets up “social learning,” where even those not directly involved in the bullying *per se* may be affected by it – resulting in a “weakening of the control or inhibitions against aggressive tendencies, diffusion of responsibility, and gradual cognitive changes in the perception of bullying and of the victim” (Salmivalli, 2001, p. 400). Thus, bullying affects not only direct participants therein, and may have lasting impacts upon all concerned.

What has been the point of developing these elaborate categories or typologies for the cast of characters involved in bullying situations? Researchers appear to believe that if the disparate characteristics of the involved student groups are acknowledged, then their differences can somehow be targeted in bullying prevention programs in such a way as to render the programs more effective: “effective bully prevention programs should consider targeting the differences in the behavior found among these...groups of students” (Unnever, 2005, p. 166). How schools conducting such programs might actually make use of the typologies to do this kind of targeting is not an easily answered question. What can a school do about the parental child-rearing techniques that seem to be such a prominent feature in the typologies? How can a school parse out the differences among the typologies themselves, where they assert that bullies have both low and high self-esteem, lack friends and are popular?⁵ How would a school use

⁵ Undoubtedly, the research upon which the typologies are based suffers from some of the same methodological shortcomings and inconsistencies that beleaguer the prevalence studies, as discussed above; this may account for some of the oddly inconsistent features encountered in the typologies themselves.

information about the supposed behavioral characteristics of a victim (the sensitivity, quietness, low-self esteem, anxiety, depression, etc.) to forestall future victimization?

None of this is at all clear from the research in question.

Bullying impacts. Studies on the actual impacts of bullying in the school setting are, in fact, few. One author has made a positive connection between bullying and school absenteeism or truancy (Reid, 1989, 2005); others have explored the linkages between bullying (and in particular, a bullying intervention program) and students' educational achievement (Beran, 2009; Beran, Hughes, & Lupart, 2008; Beran & Lupart, 2009; Boulton et al., 2008; Fonagy et al., 2005; Graham, Bellmore, & Mize, 2006b). One study has looked at the relationship between being bullied and dropping out of school (Townsend, Flisher, Chikobvu, Lombard, & King, 2008). Overall, however, little research appears to have been done into how bullying affects the business of what a school is supposed to accomplish: teaching and learning.

Some literature has also focused upon the extreme external manifestations of the impacts of bullying – in school shootings and suicides (see Part A.1.a., above), and in other criminal behavior on the part of former bullies and victims (Lane, 1989; Olweus, 1993).⁶

The lion's share of the bullying research on the impacts and outcomes of bullying, however, has concerned itself with the psychological impacts of bullying, especially upon its victims (Hawker & Boulton, 2000). Hawker and Boulton (2000) performed a meta-analysis on twenty years' worth of cross-sectional, correlative studies exploring whether

⁶ Olweus (1993) claims that bullies "run a clearly increased risk of later engaging in other problem behaviors such as criminality and alcohol abuse" (p. 36). He cites his own studies, which conclude that "as much as 35-40 percent of ...former bullies had three or more convictions by this age [24], while this was true of only 10 percent of the control boys" (Olweus, 1993, p. 36).

there is a positive relationship between peer victimization or bullying, on the one hand, and psychosocial maladjustment (“depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, and the like” (p. 441)), on the other. After analyzing a total of 22 studies, the authors concluded:

Together [the studies] demonstrate that victims of peer aggression suffer a variety of feelings of psychosocial distress. They feel more anxious, socially anxious, depressed, lonely, and worse about themselves than do nonvictims. The evidence suggests that these feelings occur among victims of both sexes, of all age groups, and of all subtypes of aggression. Across studies in which different informants’ reports were used to measure victimization and adjustment, the aggregated effects show that victims’ reports of distress cannot be explained away as an artefact of shared method variance...Conclusions such as these have been drawn before from single empirical studies ... Here they are clearly demonstrated in a pattern of aggregated quantitative effects. (p. 453)

The authors go on to comment that “they are not pleasant conclusions; they reveal a pattern of distress that can no longer be ignored” (p. 453).

While one might surmise that a psychologically distressed, victimized child might have more difficulty engaging in learning in a school setting, there appears to be meager research on this notion, one way or the other.

Interventions. As discussed above, in the wake of school suicides and shootings, a surge of public attention was focused upon the problem of school bullying, and a host of both governmentally sponsored and privately funded anti-bullying programs has emerged in schools, both abroad and in the United States (Smith et al, 2004a). While these programs vary one from another, they share a common purpose: they want to prevent school bullying from happening altogether. To achieve that end, most seek to improve school climate, by involving and educating all members of the school community (including teachers, staff, and parents) as to the seriousness of the bullying problem and the roles which they may play in countering it. Much of the bullying

literature is devoted to recommending, describing or evaluating these bullying prevention programs (Craig, Pepler, & Atlas, 2000; Crothers & Kolbert, 2004, 2008; Hunt, 2007; Jenson & Dieterich, 2007; Marachi, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2007b; Olweus, 1993, 1995, 2003; Rigby, 2005; Salmivalli et al., 2005; Smith & Brain, 2000; Smith, Pepler, & Rigby, 2004a; Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

One volume of note is Smith et al (2004a), a compendium of independent evaluations of thirteen bullying prevention programs, covering three continents and eleven countries. The evaluation studies find varying degrees of success or failure among the programs in reducing the incidence of bullying in the participating schools. In the closing paragraph of the book, the authors make an interesting observation as to one set of elements found to be missing in evaluations of anti-bullying programs:

“[m]easurements of school attendance, engagement, motivation, and academic attainment” (Smith et al, 2004a, p. 322). They note further:

From an evaluation standpoint, it is incumbent upon us to measure outcomes that are relevant to the educational system as it now exists. Principals and teachers are pressed to ensure that their students meet academic standards. Those of us who work in the bullying field have no doubt that these negative interactions impact on academic performance. (p. 322).

They may have no doubt of the school-related impact of bullying interactions – their research, however, neither confirms nor denies such impact.

Despite all the energy and resources being poured into myriad intervention programs across the globe, at least one author has concluded that “research has not produced any conclusive evidence on which of the different [intervention] perspectives and associated practices are most likely to reduce bullying in schools” (Rigby, 2004, p. 297). Indeed, a few studies have begun to suggest that anti-bullying “modules” or

short-term educational interventions engrafted upon existing school curricula have little or no effect (Hunt, 2007; Jenson & Dieterich, 2007).

The Bullying Strand: Problems and Unanswered Questions

While a substantial quantity of studies have been performed that focus on bullying as a serious, but preventable phenomenon, a number of questions go unanswered by this strand of research. The first flows from the definition of bullying itself. Not only is the definition amorphous and unwieldy in its application, as discussed above; but one of its three main prongs – that of “power imbalance” – has been largely left unexplored in the bullying research literature. While some authors stress the importance of disparities of power in bullying behavior (Lane, 1989; Stephenson & Smith, 1989), and Olweus makes reference to power differences in his Bully/Victim Questionnaire through which he establishes bullying prevalence rates in school populations (advising respondents that “it is not *bullying* when two students of about the same strength or power argue or fight” (Olweus, 2001, p. 6)), few studies have even begun to measure or study this important definitional element in a systematic way (Frisen, Holmqvist, & Oscarsson, 2008; Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; Vaillancourt et al., 2003).

What is the role of the power differential in a bullying relationship? Are power differences capable of being eradicated through a neat little intervention program – or is it a given that “there are invariably considerable imbalances of power between children” in schools (Rigby, 2004, p. 289)? If power imbalances are somehow inevitable, do they necessarily need to be manifested through bullying behaviors? Is Anna, in fact, correct in her appraisal of the reality of the situation – that “everyone is going to bully someone – it’s not going to stop – it’s what our society is” (see p. 3, above)?

A second dilemma arises from the research focus on prevalence estimates. While no one can agree on the “correct” number for a bullying prevalence rate in our schools, the upshot of all that research seems to be a consensus that the problem is widespread. It is commonplace for articles studying bullying or victimization to begin by asserting something along the lines that, for example, “it appears that most children have been bullied at some time or another during the course of their school careers” (B. K. Ladd & Ladd, 2001, p. 25). Yet the occurrence of the types of events that triggered interest in bullying research in the first place – the school suicides and shootings – is proportionally miniscule, and generally cited through anecdotal evidence only. While many students are victimized by their peers, relatively few subsequently overtly harm themselves or others. Many continue their school lives outwardly unscathed (B. K. Ladd & Ladd, 2001, p. 25). And, as our prefatory anecdote from the Dinner with Dignitaries (see p. 4, above) indicated, some go on to achieve quite a lot. The research focusing on bullying does not purport to account for the fact that, while many are bullied, few fall apart. How might that difference be explained?

A third issue comes from the way that most of the bullying research has heretofore been focused upon bullying as an illness or a psychopathology to be “cured” or prevented. As discussed above, studies have gone to great lengths to establish and explore the psychological difficulties occurring alongside bullying involvement. Hawker and Boulton (2000), in their meta-analysis of victimization studies, come to the conclusion that this focus of research has been exhausted, stressing that “there is little need now for further cross-sectional studies of peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment. It is clear enough already that victims are distressed” (p. 453). The

authors suggest that future studies address questions that might help “practitioners ... begin to make a serious impact on the distress that children feel when they are bullied” (p. 453).

In other words, we do not need to study any more the psychological impact of bullying – that has been done, the distress has been established. Rather, we would do better to study how victims have come to deal with and/or overcome the ill effects of their victimization. The second strand of research – the one that focuses upon bullying in the overall context of peer relationships – may provide a way to approach some of the questions left unanswered by the bullying research heretofore described.

The Peer Relationship Strand of Research

The Peer Relationship Strand: Victimization within Relationship Continua

Unlike the extensive bullying strand of research discussed above, the peer relationship strand does not appear to have been triggered by a desire to explain horrific events like school suicides or shootings. Rather, this line of research is situated within a larger body of literature exploring the role played by relationships in children’s adjustment to and achievement in school. Beginning with Steven Asher in the 1970s and 1980s, researchers have studied children who had been rejected by their peers, and concluded that peer rejection was a predictor of school adjustment problems (Asher & Coie, 1990). Over time, they have come to see peer victimization or bullying as one kind of relationship among the many in which school children participate.

These researchers understand peer victimization not as a unique peer-to-peer relationship (as the bullying literature seems to do); instead, they place peer victimization along two different kinds of relationship continua. The first continuum is anchored on

one end by healthy friendships and on the other by peer abuse or victimization (Crick, Nelson, Morales, Cullerton-Sen, Casa, & Hickman, 2001; G. W. Ladd, Kochenderfer, & Coleman, 1997; Rigby, 2005; Tattum, 1989). In between, there can be many roles: friendships, best friends, group membership, acceptance by peers, benign neglect, ignoring, isolation, rejection, and abuse in its starkest forms. These many roles interact – each child may participate in a number of different forms of peer relationships – and have both unique and shared impacts upon how a child adjusts to school.

The second continuum views victimization as one stop on a temporal road, between early acceptance or rejection by peers, on one end, and different school or psychological outcomes (such as levels of school achievement, adjustment, engagement, liking, avoidance, or of loneliness, anxiety, self-esteem) for a victimized child, on the other (Boivin et al., 2001; Buhs, 2005; Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006; Flook, Repetti, & Ullman, 2005; Graham & Juvonen, 1998, 2001; Juvonen, Nishina, & Graham, 2000; Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996; Schwartz, Gorman, Nakamoto, & Toblin, 2005). Often called “process models” or “sequential models,” (Boivin & Hymel, 1997; Boivin et al., 2001; Flook et al., 2005), these studies try to tease out the unique contribution that victimization relationships (among all the other overlapping relationships and factors) might make to children’s ultimate success or failure in school or life. They attempt to figure out what causes what – indeed, one of the first studies in this strand is entitled “Peer victimization: Cause or consequence of school maladjustment” (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996) – by studying different factors in temporal sequences and quantifying the extent of the relationships that emerge.

The Peer Relationship Strand: Mediating Factors

In view of the complexity and overlapping nature of the different relationships and other experiences in which a child participates, it is difficult to establish a single direct causal link between being in one particular type of relationship (victimization) and a specific school outcome (e.g., absenteeism or achievement). The peer relationship researchers have found, instead, that it is more fruitful to explore what happens between the experience of victimization and the studied outcome. For example, Juvonen et al (2000) found the direct correlative link between peer harassment and school adjustment outcomes (GPA and absenteeism) to be relatively weak; when they looked, however, at whether peer harassment may have been followed by psychological maladjustment (depression, loneliness), which in turn may have been followed by school adjustment problems – then the strength of linkages increased. The authors’ conclusion was that, to at least some extent, the relationship between harassment and school adjustment is “mediated” by psychological adjustment factors (Juvonen et al., 2000).

Though the mediating model studies differ one from another in the precise factors tested, they pose a similar overarching question: what are the factors mediating between victimization, on the one hand, and different school and non-school outcomes for the child, on the other, that might account for the differences among those outcomes? Or, as B.K. Ladd & Ladd (2001) (after noting that, while victimization is a “common experience,” it seems negatively to affect the social, emotional, or academic adjustment of relatively few of its victims) more succinctly put it, such studies seek “to consider why peer harassment may harm some children more than others” (p. 25).

These quantitative studies tend to follow similar templates. Often using a longitudinal approach,⁷ and employing structural equation modeling methodology, the studies test the extent to which different factors might explain outcomes. Some of the tested mediating factors focus inwards, into the psychological post-victimization experience of the child: these factors include causal self-attributions (that is, do children attribute the cause of their victimization to something within themselves, or to external circumstances?) (Graham, Bellmore, & Mize, 2006a; Graham & Juvonen, 2001; Juvonen et al., 2000, 2001); internalizing vs. externalizing problems (Hoglund, 2007); social-cognitive processes (Hoglund & Leadbeater, 2007); emotional distress, depression, anxiety, loneliness, or sadness (Schwartz et al., 2005); fear and emotional control (Terranova et al., 2008); and self-concept or self-worth (Flook et al., 2005).⁸ Others look at mediating variables occurring beyond the child's psyche, such as: classroom participation or engagement (Buhs et al., 2006); school connectedness (You, Furlong, Felix, Sharkey, Tanigawa, & Green, 2008); friendships (Boivin et al., 2001; Lamarche, Brendgen, Boivin, Vitaro, & Perusse, 2006); disruptive behavior and poor peer

⁷ A number of researchers have conducted what they call "short-term longitudinal studies" (e.g., Buhs, 2005; Buhs & Ladd, 2001; Dhami, Hoglund, Leadbeater, & Boone, 2005; Leadbeater, Hoglund, & Woods, 2003; Schwartz et al., 2005; Terranova et al., 2008). While this term sounds like an oxymoron, it in fact represents a methodology through which the researcher surveys a student population about their victimization experiences soon after the beginning of the school year, inquires about the identified mediating factors sometime during the course of the school year, and then examines outcome evidence at the end of the school year. In this way, the researchers hope to establish a chronological sequence of events (victimization -> mediating factor -> outcomes) for purposes of drawing causal inferences.

⁸ One matter of some confusion when reviewing these peer relationship studies is that some researchers test the **mediating** power of a particular factor that is used as an **outcome variable** by other authors in different studies. For example, Flook et al (2005) tests internalizing symptoms such as anxiety or depression as mediating variables, while the Graham and Juvonen (1998) study uses social anxiety as an outcome variable. Hoglund (2007) looks at school engagement both as part of the outcome variable of school functioning – which includes engagement and achievement – and as an intervening process between internalizing/externalizing problems (her mediating variable) and achievement. You, et al. (2008) explores school connectedness (defined similarly to school engagement) as a mediating variable – but his outcome variable is "hope and life satisfaction." This just points up the recurrent difficulty in determining ultimately what may be the chicken and what may be the egg.

interactions (Beran & Lupart, 2009); social support (Davidson & Demaray, 2007); different aspects of school environment (Bellmore, Witkow, Graham, & Juvonen, 2004; Meyer-Adams & Conner, 2008); ethnicity or diversity within the school population (Bellmore et al., 2004; Graham, 2006; Graham et al., 2006b); poverty and gender (Dhami et al., 2005); or the intensity, frequency, or duration of the victimization itself (Bradshaw et al., 2007; Ellis & Shute, 2007; B. K. Ladd & Ladd, 2001; Nylund et al., 2007). Some studies look to the coping strategies employed by the children themselves as mediating influences (Kochenderfer-Ladd & Skinner, 2002; Lodge & Feldman, 2007; Smith, Talamelli, Cowie, Naylor, & Chauhan, 2004b).

This quantitative, mediating factor approach is insightful and helpful, as far as it goes. Each of the factors tested by researchers so far in each study, however, concededly only accounts for a relatively small slice of the variance in outcomes for victimized children. For example, in Buhs (2005), the tested mediating factors of “academic self-concept” and “classroom engagement” accounted for about 9% and 16% respectively in the outcome variable of “academic adjustment” – leaving over 80% of the variance unexplained. The author observed that “there may be multiple independent pathways via which negative peer treatment affects achievement” (p. 421). Buhs et al (2006) most recently noted that their studies likely “tap only some of the factors that are associated with children’s early school engagement and achievement patterns and that the reported linkages should be examined in the context of other theoretically relevant predictors” (p. 11).

Moreover, it is not at all clear that the mediating factors, as labeled by the researchers, truly represent the underlying data collected through their quantitative survey

instruments. For example, in one study, a factor labeled “classroom engagement” is tested, to determine the extent to which it might mediate between peer victimization and variations in school achievement by children who had been victimized. Yet an examination of the rating scale deployed in the study to measure “classroom engagement” reveals that it is exactly the same scale used in other studies to represent “classroom participation” (Buhs & Ladd, 2001), and that most of the scale items address a child’s level of compliance with his/her teacher’s authority⁹ -- not an entirely accurate representation of the multi-faceted notion of classroom engagement that most of us mean when we use the term.¹⁰ This may be an example of what has been called “construct underrepresentation” – a potentially “major threat to construct validity,” where a measurement is too narrow and “fails to include important dimensions or facets of the construct” (Messick, 1995, p. 742). Thus, the mediating factors identified and tested by researchers in the peer relationship line of research may not only be missing many of the variables bearing upon whether a child succeeds or fails after having been bullied – they also may not validly represent the underlying constructs which they are purported to reflect.

Additional factors have been recommended as potentially fruitful avenues for further research (for example, the “teacher-child relationship” (Buhs et al., 2006, p. 11)¹¹). Other factors remain largely unexplored – for example, institutional factors within

⁹ Six of the scale items for “classroom participation” are “follows teacher’s directions,” “uses classroom materials responsibly,” “is easy for teacher to manage,” “responds promptly to teacher requests,” “accepts teacher’s authority,” “accepts responsibility for a given task” (Buhs, 2005, pp. 413, 415).

¹⁰ There is an extensive literature on the many aspects of classroom engagement (see Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004, for a thorough review of this literature).

¹¹ A number of very recent studies have begun to explore the impact of teacher/staff support on victims of bullying (Beran & Lupart, 2009; Bradshaw et al., 2007; Davidson & Demaray, 2007; Ellis & Shute, 2007;

the school (such as what kinds of assistance might be given or impediments placed in the way of teachers trying to help),¹² victimized children's relationships with other adults, non-classroom activities involvement, etc.

We are left with a number of questions (not dissimilar to questions raised by our review of the bullying strand of the literature, see Part A.3, above): do we know the whole ballpark of potential factors that might make a difference in the school outcomes for a child who has been victimized by his or her peers? Might there be something out there – something lodged in the experience of the victimized child – that could be mediating between victimization and outcome, but that we have heretofore failed thoroughly to consider?

Not only may there be heretofore unstudied factors mediating the victim-outcome association, but also are the ones we have been considering being measured in different ways? As we have mentioned above, school engagement potentially is an important variable to examine when attempting to understand this association. Yet what some studies measure as engagement is really a metric of school compliance. What some studies call attendance is measured not as an actual measure of attendance but a students' self-reports of how likely they are to miss school.

Given these possible connections among the variables of peer victimization, student attendance, student engagement, and student achievement, more research is needed to allow educators to make informed decisions regarding effective peer

Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; James, Lawlor, Courtney, Flynn, Henry, & Murphy, 2008; Marachi, Astor, & Benbenishty, 2007a; Nation, Vieno, Perkins, & Santinello, 2008).

¹² But see Meyers-Adams & Conner (2008) and Roland and Galloway (2004), suggesting that school psychosocial environment or culture has an impact on bullying prevalence rates.

victimization programs and policies. If a clear connection can be made between the effects of peer victimization on victims and their attendance – and interviews with truant students suggest there is such a connection (see Appendix B) - then more consideration needs to be made towards preventing and diminishing peer victimization, as well as providing a sense of adult advocacy and support for dealing with the peer victimization incidents for the identified students. In particular, school personnel might be made aware that victimized students have poor attendance, and they can then focus efforts to lower victimization-caused truancy. This would, in effect, be a direct strategy to improve student achievement and a legitimate and necessary school improvement goal to be included in school improvement planning in the future. Good attendance is necessary for academic achievement, and anything educators can do to promote students attending school at higher rates deserves attention.

We have designed three studies to address these gaps and limitations in previous research that has attempted to explore the connections discussed above. Study 1 is a quantitative study whose purpose was to develop a predictive/causal model that would explain the relationships among peer victimization, school attendance, school engagement and school achievement. In this study we used direct measures of school attendance and achievement and a previously validated measure of school engagement. Study 2 is a qualitative study of the school experiences of bullied children. From this study we planned to gain insight into school instructional, interpersonal, and structural factors that affect the victimization-attendance connection. Study 3 is also a qualitative study of teachers' experiences with efforts to ameliorate the impact of school victimization.

Chapter Two – Study 1

Peer Victimization, Student Engagement, Student Achievement and Attendance: A Structural Equation Model of the Interrelationships.

As we have pointed out so far in this review, there is a link between attendance and achievement (Beran, 2009; Boulton et al., 2008), and several studies suggest a connection between peer victimization levels and attendance as well (Banks, 1997; Fried & Fried, 1996; Garrity et al., 1997; Hoover & Oliver, 1996). Certainly, research on peer victimization has demonstrated numerous negative psychological impacts. The purpose of this research study was to determine if these negative impacts lead to other problems for the victimized youth, specifically decreased school attendance. The severity of victimization from peer victimization should logically increase the number of school absences for the victims. In addition, a school engagement component was included in this study to determine whether a student's school engagement levels mediate the impact of peer victimization on attendance. If peer victimization leads either directly or indirectly to lowered attendance rates, then understandably, school achievement is negatively affected as well. Efforts to control peer victimization in schools could be viewed as direct interventions to improve student achievement.

Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) and Buhs and Ladd (2001) have examined the relationships between victimized youth and their achievement. In addition, they have included school avoidance as a mediating variable. However, students' specific attendance rates were not a focus of their research, and their variables of peer victimization and achievement do not work to answer the questions of interest to this proposed study.

To answer the proposed research questions for this study, the fit of a latent variable model similar to the one examined by Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) was evaluated. However, the peer victimization severity and peer victimization types were clearly denoted as separate variables to form the latent variable construct for peer victimization. In addition, types of peer victimization and severity of victimization were self-reported by students as opposed to teacher-nominated victimization. Finally, the school avoidance variable was actual student attendance rates, rather than perceived desire to miss school as in the Buhs, Ladd and Herald study. Different treatment of each of these variables served to answer the questions of interest for this research project.

This study contributes to the larger body of research on peer victimization. Unique to this study was the use of self-reported victimization as a measure for peer victimization. Much of the prior research uses teacher-reported identification of victims. This procedure assumes that the teacher in a classroom has a better feel for victimization than do the victims themselves. Going directly to the primary source and asking for personal experience around peer victimization should be a better method for assessing which students are real sufferers from peer victimization. Another purpose of this study was to identify children who have varying levels of school absences and to relate this to their experiences of peer victimization. A connection between peer victimization and school absenteeism explains that the more school absences a child has, the more likely he or she has experienced peer victimization. In short, those facing more frequent peer victimization incidents may have poor attendance rates. Logically, these poor attendance rates have in turn been found to lead to declining academic achievement.

In addition, truant youths often commit crimes (Garry, 1996). Thus, it behooves any serious effort to reduce or prevent juvenile delinquency to include some aspect of truancy reduction as well. Although social scientists for years have studied a variety of reasons why kids skip school, the role played by peer victimization in truancy has not been explored sufficiently. The problem addressed in this research study focused both upon establishing the existence of a peer victimization-truancy link and upon understanding the nature of that link. This knowledge will inform and enhance efforts to reduce truancy and, ultimately perhaps, reduce youth crime and increase student achievement.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following overriding question: What is the relationship between peer victimization in schools and absenteeism?

More specifically, using pre-existing, longitudinal data, 13 research questions were considered to answer the larger research interest when completing this study:

- (1) What frequencies of peer victimization behaviors do 6th grade students experience as middle school students?
- (2) What intensity of peer victimization behaviors do 6th grade students experience as middle school students?
- (3) What are the levels of school engagement for 6th grade students in middle school?
- (4) What are the relationships between frequency of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism?
- (5) What is the relationship between intensity of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism rate?
- (6) What are the relationships between levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement in schools and absenteeism?

(7) What are the relationships between frequencies of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization and the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement?

(8) Does the frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity for affected youths predict their subsequent absenteeism?

(9) Do the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement behaviors predict subsequent absenteeism?

(10) Does the frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity for affected youths predict total school engagement?

(11) Does treatment of the peer victimization and school engagement variables as latent constructs rather than direct measurements serve to provide a measurement model with adequate fit?

(12) Does treatment of peer victimization, student engagement, attendance, and achievement variables different from the study by Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) serve to provide a measurement model with adequate fit?

(13) Does a structural equation model controlling for the fall survey data by using multiple group analysis, with the same latent treatment of the peer victimization and school engagement variables, demonstrate good model fit?

Ultimately, it was the intent of this study to create a conceptual linear model combining the victimization, engagement, attendance, and achievement variables and assess whether the model fits the data. The many research questions were included to provide a framework by which to evaluate the complex interrelationships between the variables. The studies examining the effects of peer harassment on victim's psychological well-being and those examining the effects of peer harassment on school success have emerged as two different studies. It is unclear, for example, whether peer harassment has independent effects on both psychological and school adjustment, or whether school difficulties are consequences or causes of adjustment problems related to victim status. It was the researcher's belief that attendance and peer victimization are interrelated.

Hypotheses

The purpose of this research study was to evaluate the connection between peer victimization and absenteeism. The researcher hypothesized that students do face significant levels of peer victimization in schools. In addition, it was hypothesized that there is a significant correlation between self-reported peer victimization for sixth grade students and their absenteeism rates. It was believed that the level of self-reported peer victimization affects levels of absenteeism and/or school engagement. In other words, as victimization levels increase for individual students, those students have more absences and they become less engaged in their schoolwork. As stated earlier, it was hypothesized that school engagement is a mediating variable between victimization and absenteeism. And, both school engagement and absenteeism have direct effects on school achievement. Lastly, it was hypothesized that a structural equation model would fit the relationships suggested between the variables; prior research with different treatment of the variables indicated adequate fit, but the data used for this particular study included self-reported victimization rates, specificity around peer victimization types, inclusion of a peer victimization intensity variable, and a unique, more adequate order to the variables in the measurement model.

More specifically, to address the actual research questions that guide this study, the following null hypotheses were evaluated:

H₀1: Sixth grade middle school students do not experience significant frequencies of peer victimization behaviors.

H₀2: Sixth grade middle school students do not experience significant levels of peer victimization behaviors.

H₀3: Students do not have statistically significantly differing levels of engagement

in the three subtypes of engagement (behavioral, cognitive, emotional).

H₀4: Correlations between each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism are not statistically significant at the .05 level.

H₀5: The correlation between intensity of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism rate is not statistically significant at the .05 level.

H₀6: Correlations between each of the three types of self-reported school engagement in schools and absenteeism are not statistically significant at the .05 level.

H₀7: Correlations between frequencies of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization, victimization intensity, and the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement are not statistically significant at the .05 level.

H₀8: There is no statistically significant relationship between a linear combination of the four different types of predictor variables, including frequency of victimization and victimization intensity, and the dependent variable of student absenteeism.

H₀9: There is no statistically significant relationship between a linear combination of the predictor variables of the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement and the dependent variable of absenteeism.

H₀10: There is no statistically significant relationship between a linear combination of the predictor variables of frequency of victimization (by victimization type), victimization intensity and the dependent variable of total school engagement.

H₀11: A measurement model treating the peer victimization and school engagement variables as latent constructs provide a good-fitting measurement model.

H₀12: A structural equation model, similar to the one proposed by Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006), but with different treatment of the victimization and engagement variables, does not provide a good-fitting measurement model.

H₀13: This same structural equation model, modified to control for the fall survey data, will not provide a good-fitting measurement model.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). AYP is the primary accountability measure of the Federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Achieving AYP requires meeting specific

reading and math achievement targets as well as test participation rates for each of the elementary, middle, and high school levels (Colorado Department of Education, 2008).

Bully. A bully is a student who engages in peer victimization behaviors, often for the need to feel power and control over others (Banks, 1997).

Bullying. See peer victimization.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A federal law established on January 8, 2002 designed to improve student achievement. NCLB established a renewed focus on accountability for results and an emphasis on change based on scientific research. Assessment programs and school report cards were mandated for all states (U.S. Department of Education, 2003).

Peer Victimization. “Any repeated negative activity or aggression intended to harm or bother someone who is perceived by peers as being less physically or psychologically powerful than the aggressor(s)” (Glew et al. 2005).

Student Engagement. Student Engagement is a variable defined to help determine why some students do better in school than others; an attempt at quantifying their interest, effort, and attitude. Students with higher engagement levels in the classroom have characteristics while at school that improve their functioning in the school setting (Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008). Recent studies of school engagement have treated engagement as a multi-faceted construct, including the areas of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement (Espelage & Holt, 2001).

Truant. Truancy is defined as intentional but unauthorized absence from compulsory schooling. This is different from an "excused" absence, such as one related to illness or injury. Under Colorado law, “truant” is defined as four or more unexcused

absences in a single month, or ten unexcused absences in a year (Colorado Department of Education, 2008). Although truancy is a major focus for school districts, this research project will treat absenteeism as a construct that includes both trancies and excused absences. It is believed that students who miss school due to fear of victimization may be able to get parental permission to be absent, so even though the absence is “Excused,” it still reflects that the student did not want to be at school.

Victim. Those students targeted by the peer victimization behaviors, often are characterized by anxious, insecure, cautious, and/or suffering from low self-esteem (Banks, 1997). Different from other studies of peer victimization, this study will treat victimization as three different types: exclusion, physical abuse, and verbal abuse.

Delimitations of the Study

Results of this study are delimited by the following:

1. The data from this study were limited to Adams County 12 Five Star Public Schools.
2. The data from this study were limited to 6th grade (classified as middle school in Adams County 12) students.
3. The data from this study were only for the 2007-2008 school year.

These delimitations speak to the generalizability of the results; however, it was assumed that the characteristics of the Adams County 12 Five Star Public Schools used to generate the data are similar enough to other districts with truancy and peer victimization problems that findings can be generalized to others.

Because of the repeated measures nature of the data used for this study, some data were lost. Some students measured in the fall semester, were dropped from analysis because they were not able to participate in the spring survey, and conversely, some

students measured in the spring semester did not have data from the fall. Still, the data collection design should allow for a clearer understanding of causal relationships because changes over time to students' victimization levels and school attendance can be analyzed.

In addition, the researchers used self-reported victimization data. This assumes that the students are both aware of and honest about their levels of victimization. Students may be inclined to either over- or under-exaggerate victimization levels for many reasons. For instance, a student may feel it necessary to not report peer victimization for fear of retaliation from the bullies themselves. Or, conversely, a student may report more incidences of peer victimization looking for extra attention. Ultimately, it was the researcher's belief that the individual student is the best source for data regarding their own personal levels of experienced and perceived peer victimization even though victimization levels cannot be perfectly measured. The merits of self-reported peer abuse will be discussed more in the literature review.

We assumed the survey was given in a manner conducive to getting the best results. Hopefully, students were encouraged to complete the survey honestly and candidly. Additionally, the researchers assumed children had adequate time to complete the survey with integrity, and those adults involved in the administration of the survey followed the guidelines equally.

Organization of the Study

This study used existing data from a survey distributed by the Colorado Foundation for Families & Children. Research questions guided the used of correlation and regression analyses to guide the exploration of the nature of the peer victimization –

student attendance link. Ultimately, a latent variable model similar to the one explored by Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) was assessed, with the major difference being the treatment of the variables. Structural equation modeling allows for evaluation of a model and changes based on fit indices and theory; consequently, other models emerged from the original hypothesized model analyses.

Review of the Literature Specific to Study 1

The focus of this review is to examine the nature of peer victimization, the types and prevalence of peer victimization while also considering the impact of peer victimization on students' lives. The hypothesis of the researchers is that peer victimization has negative impacts on school attendance, and possibly, these impacts are mediated by school engagement. Ultimately, missed school negatively affects student achievement. Thus, it is the intention of this review to include a thorough examination of current understandings of trends in school attendance as well as school engagement. Exploring the possible relationships between victimization, engagement, and attendance will be the intention of the data analysis.

Peer Victimization

Through the process of gathering information from many studies and summaries of the research on peer victimization, it became very apparent that the Norwegian researcher, Dan Olweus, is widely regarded as the expert and pioneer in the world of research on peer victimization and its effects in schools. His name is cited in almost every major study or article addressing the topic. Interestingly, many of the published research articles are merely summaries of prior work, and often they are prescriptions from larger organizations on identification and prevention of peer victimization in schools. However,

clear themes around the causes and effects of peer victimization emerge as one begins to examine peer victimization in more depth.

What is peer victimization?

Many researchers have attempted to define peer victimization, and much of the conducted research has been done using various assumed constructs for peer victimization. In fact, the term peer victimization has many synonyms that are used in the research; peer harassment, peer abuse, and bullying to name a few. All of these widely accepted terms for peer victimization have slightly different connotations, and there is no universally accepted definition of peer victimization. However, Olweus (1993) might have crafted the most widely accepted definition of peer victimization for use in educational research, and this definition will serve to help form the construct for purposes of this research study:

A student is being victimized when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students... It is a negative action when someone inflicts, or attempts to inflict, injury or discomfort upon another – basically what is implied in the definition of aggressive behaviour (sic). Negative actions can be carried out by words (verbally), for instance, by threatening, taunting, teasing, and calling names. It is a negative action when somebody hits, pushes, kicks, pinches or restrains another – by physical contact. It is also possible to carry out negative actions without use of words or physical contact, such as making faces or dirty gestures, intentionally excluding someone from a group, or refusing to comply with another person's wishes. (p. 9)

As made clear by Olweus, peer victimization can take many different forms; it can be physical, verbal, or even relational (when a student is excluded or ostracized by others). This study will utilize a three-faceted construct that includes each of these types of victimization. Regardless of the forms it may take, the one agreed upon element of peer victimization by all researchers is the fact that it most likely will lead to negative

psychological and behavioral effects on the victims. In addition, the peer victimization acts must be repetitive. A single incident of attack does not serve as peer victimization, but rather many attacks over time form peer victimization. All studies on peer victimization utilize a definition of the construct that includes multiple attacks on the victim. Lastly, not implicit to the above definition, Olweus (1993) saw an imbalance of power to be a major component of peer victimization. In other words, the strong pick on the weak. There is a social order established in our schools with an imbalance of power between students that leads to the peer victimization behaviors and their various impacts on victims.

Other definitions for the construct of peer victimization do exist. The National Safe Schools Partnership has proposed federal legislation that would effectively define peer victimization and harassment for anti-bullying programming and appropriate punishment purposes as the following:

Conduct that adversely affects one or more students, depriving them of access to educational opportunities or benefits provided by their schools... including conduct that is based on a student's actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion. (NSSP, 2007)

This definition of peer victimization includes a school effect component as well as a harassment element. Used to identify peer victimization in schools, the NSSP crafts a broad definition that deals with the many ways an attacker can pick on a victim including race, sex, religion, etc. This definition of peer victimization may be more appropriate for use in school research because it directly addresses the fact that victimized youths experience a negative impact on their schooling. The NSSP is attempting to construct a definition that can be used to evaluate school programs aimed at defeating peer

victimization behavior in schools.

Perhaps the definition most pertinent to this proposed study in the current literature comes from Colorado State Law (because of the location of the data collection): “Any written or verbal expression, or physical act or gesture, or a pattern thereof, that is intended to cause distress upon one or more students” (Colo. Public Act No. 02-119, 2002). This understanding of peer victimization is clear and concise, and many school policies and programs addressing peer victimization have been crafted using this definition. However, this definition does not include the most recent type of peer victimization – cyberbullying – that is the use of technology to intimidate or cause pain in the victims. Many currently accepted definitions were created before technology became such a large part of students’ lives. But today, anyone with access to the Internet can post hurtful comments about or threats to someone; however, even worse, these comments can be saved to forums where they can be read by anyone else.

Again, to define the construct of peer victimization is a difficult task. Combining the commonalities of the many different but accepted definitions in the literature might be the best method of coming to an agreed upon understanding of the phenomenon. It appears that the various definitions all include that peer victimization can be either physical or verbal. It seems that most definitions also include a component of repetition. In other words, peer victimization isn’t regarded as a single attack, but behaviors that occur repeatedly over time.

For the purposes of this study, the utilized definition for peer victimization will have three components:

- (1) It can be physical, verbal, or exclusionary in nature.

(2) Attacks are repeated over time.

(3) There is an imbalance of power between the attacker and the attacked.

This three-part definition will serve to create the construct appropriately viewing peer victimization and its effects as a multi-faceted phenomenon.

How prevalent is peer victimization?

Peer victimization is prevalent – prevalent enough to cause vast problems amongst the youth affected by it. Peer victimization and harassment are pervasive problems in America's schools. There are significant numbers of victimized children at all school levels, with peer victimization occurrences peaking during the middle school years. Studies consistently demonstrate the breadth of the problem; one national study demonstrates that peer victimization affects nearly one in every three American school children in grades six through ten (NSSP, 2007). Another claims that the majority of students experience some form of harassment in schools during their childhood (GLSEN, 2005). Nansel and colleagues published the first large-scale study of peer victimization in the United States in 2000. By surveying more than 15,000 students in grades six through ten, they found the prevalence of peer victimization involvement among American teens and preteens to be approximately 30% (Nansel et al., 2001). This indicates a significant number of our youth are victims.

In another recent study to determine prevalence of peer victimization among elementary students (Glew et al., 2005), twenty-two percent of children surveyed were involved in peer victimization either as a victim, an attacker, or both. In addition, it was found that victims were more likely to have low academic achievement, and they were significantly more likely to feel unsafe at school, and worse yet, they felt sad most days.

Most important to this study is that victims were more likely to report feeling that they don't belong at school, which could have a direct impact on attendance. In other words, victimized children dislike school and want to avoid it (Glew et al., 2005). In his various reports and studies, Olweus established that approximately 15% of students are either victimized regularly or are initiators of peer victimization behavior (Olweus, 1993). But this figure may be low, as it is the summary of research conducted over fifteen years ago. A more recent national study claims that peer victimization affects nearly one in every three American schoolchildren in sixth through tenth grade (NSSP, 2007). It appears that the trend is increasing victimization rates for our nation's schoolchildren.

No matter what the actual percentage of victimization is for peer victimization in American schools, it is a problem. Too many children feel unsafe. Too many children dislike school because of the negative aspects of the environment. The prevalence of victims in our schools vastly affects the overall success of the public school system. Peer victimization is not a new phenomenon in our schools, but there is evidence that the prevalence of victimization is on the rise. Examining the referenced studies chronologically indicates an upward trend in the percentages of victimized students across time. Certainly, the severity of the peer victimization acts seems to be intensifying as well as demonstrated by the current reports in the media of violent incidents in schools. Student attackers are resorting to weapons in their methods, and often victims are harmed far beyond mere mental anguish.

What are the impacts of peer victimization?

Peer victimization has serious consequences. Children and youth who are victimized are more likely than other children to be depressed, lonely, and/or anxious.

They have lower self-esteems, and can be absent from school at greater rates. They often feel sick, and sometimes they even begin to think about suicide (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007).

In addition, a strong association appears to exist between peer victimization of other students during the school years and experiencing illegal or criminal behaviors as adults (Olweus, 1993). So the victims are obviously impacted, but peer victimization indicates problems for the instigators as well. In one study, 60% of those characterized as bullies in grades 6-9 had at least one criminal conviction by age 24 (Olweus, 1993). Another study indicated that bullies as youth continued their negative behaviors towards others into their adult years (Koki, 1991). These may include simple anti-social behaviors, but those who attack others as children, usually do not do well as adults.

Most interesting from the recent findings in a study conducted by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services is that peer victimization can negatively impact school attendance. Evidence suggests that children who are victimized skip school to avoid being physically or mentally harmed. Sharp (1995) concluded that 20% of 723 British elementary, middle, and high school children surveyed said they would skip school as a strategy to avoid being victimized. Key to this finding, however, is that students said they would skip school, but the study did not actually measure whether they truly missed school or not. The nationwide 1995 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance study found that 4.5% of the students surveyed in grades nine through 12 reported that they had missed at least one day of school during the 30 preceding days because they had felt unsafe at school or when traveling to or from school (Kann et al., 1995). Victims often fear school and consider school to be an unsafe and unhappy place. As many as 7% of

America's eighth-graders stay home at least once a month because of their fear of bullies (Glew, 2005). Victimized children report that fear of school is a significant reason why they initially are absent from school and why they continue to miss school.

The act of being victimized tends to increase some students' sense of isolation because their peers do not want to lose status by associating with them or because they do not want to increase the risks of being victimized themselves. Friends of victimized students may alienate the victims to avoid being picked on themselves. So not only do attacked students feel victimized, they can lose their friends as well. These consequences of being victimized can lead to depression and low self-esteem, problems that can carry into adulthood (Batsche & Knoff, 1994; Olweus, 1993).

The impacts of peer victimization on the victimized students are varied and many. Victimized students suffer from mental and physical pain. In addition, lasting psychological damage well into adulthood can be a consequence. They may skip school, which logically would negatively affect achievement. And, no less devastating, they can become ostracized from their peers. Clearly, the impact of peer victimization on its victims has unpredictable outcomes for the victims themselves; nevertheless, those outcomes are usually negative, and the severity of the impacts can lead to short-term and long-term damage for those victimized students.

When is a student being victimized?

Again, for most definitions of peer victimization, attacks, whether physical or verbal, must be repeated. One experience of physical or verbal attack does not constitute peer victimization. Although there does not seem to be an accepted number of incidents that confirm actual peer victimization, several studies confirm that there is a high,

positive correlation between incidents reported and self-reported peer victimization (Espelage & Swearer, 2003; Olweus, 1993; U.S. Department of Justice, 2002). In other words, the more episodes of peer victimization, the more a student is being victimized. The consensus for research on peer victimization appears to be that a student can be qualified as a victim when the attacks, whether physical or verbal, are repeated over time (Koki, 1999). Most research studies ask students the frequency of attacks over a defined period of time. If the reported frequencies are more than one, the student is classified as a victim.

How is peer victimization measured, and how are victims identified?

Peer victimization can be reliably and validly measured. The existing measures primarily consist of self-report scales, peer nominations, and teachers' ratings. Sometimes mere behavioral observation is used as well. Each of these methods of measuring peer victimization can have valuable research purposes (Xiao, 2007). Self-reported measures of peer victimization might have the advantage when it comes to looking at academic effects from peer victimization because it is each individual student's own feeling about their level of victimization that is being used in the various analyses. A commonality of self-reported peer victimization scales is that students are asked directly how often they engaged in certain behaviors over a specified time period (Espelage & Swearer, 2003). Certainly, if a student perceives him/herself as a victim, the damage associated with peer victimization can be present.

The use of different methods of labeling victims of school peer victimization in educational research is sometimes viewed with skepticism. However for this study's purposes, responses to self-reported measures are viewed as a tool for evaluating student

constructs of peer victimization. A recent study compared demographic and descriptive characteristics and peer victimization experiences of self-labeled victims to those students who have been victimized but do not label themselves a victim (Theriot et al., 2005). Chi-square and MANOVA comparisons demonstrated that self-labeled victims experienced more specific types of peer victimization, more total peer victimization behaviors, and more frequent peer victimization than their non-labeled counterparts. Thus, it appears that students are capable of accurately identifying their own victimization levels by responding to self-observing checklists. Johnson & Lewis (1999) used the 'Life in School checklist' and O'Moore & Kirkham (2001) employed a modified version (Whitney & Smith, 1993) of the Olweus self-report questionnaire successfully in their own peer victimization research. So self-reporting does have merits as a method of determining victimization.

Benefits of self-report vs. peer nomination, teacher, or parent reports.

There are many ways for data about peer victimization to be collected. To determine the extent to which a student is victimized, one can use self-reports, peer nomination, or teacher/parent reports. All of these methods have been used in various studies for their strengths in addressing particular research questions. There is no universally accepted method for determining victimization, and regrettably each method has weaknesses.

For purposes of this study, it is presumed that self-report of victimization levels is the best method. For one, it is assumed that each individual child is the best observer of his/her own circumstances, and would best be able to recount any peer victimization experiences. In addition, a student's view of his/her own experience is largely

intrapersonal, and really only takes into account how he/she personally feels about interactions with others. Unfortunately, this measure may lend itself to exaggeration, as students want to convey a level of victimization that might get them help. But, as previously mentioned, studies have shown that self-reports can be reliable and valid.

Another type of victimization measure employs students in classrooms as observers of the victimization that takes place (i.e. peer nomination). A criticism of peer nomination (in which students are asked who the victims are in a class) is that the results are interpersonal. In other words, relationships and the culture of the class are considered in the students' responses. The construct being measured is often relationships in the classroom rather than true victimization. In addition, peer nomination is a controversial measure because of the danger it may bring to the classroom culture, and often, students simply don't tell the truth about other students.

Similarly, using a parent or teacher as the agent for determining which students are victims has limitations. Parents can be emotionally charged about the level to which their student is victimized. They may report higher levels of peer victimization for this reason. Teachers cannot observe every single interaction between their students, so often their view can be simplified or understated.

In sum, self-reported victimization levels may be the most valid and reliable measure for this study's purposes.

Are there multiple facets to peer victimization?

Although peer victimization is often viewed as a single construct, there is some research to suggest that it is multi-dimensional. For convenience, many studies define peer victimization as repeated negative actions towards a student, but "negative actions"

can take on many forms. There is evidence that there are three different types of victimization, all with possible negative impacts on the victimized students. Although no particular study appears to break down peer victimization behaviors by these three types, the definitions found in much of the research suggest that a three-dimensional construct is appropriate. The three types of peer victimization found in the literature are physical, verbal, and exclusion.

Physical Abuse.

First, and most obvious, is that peer victimization can be physical. Any harmful actions towards one's body including pinching, hitting, or kicking is peer victimization (Olweus, 1993). Sometimes bullies enlist peers to assist in the assaults. In fact, one study (O'Connell, Craig, & Pepler, 1999) claims that peers are involved in as many as 85% of peer victimization episodes whether by actively participating or passively reinforcing. Physical abuse is the most obvious form of peer victimization to bystanders because it can lead to cuts and bruises or other visible evidence of abuse, but physical abuse is less prevalent than verbal abuse (Olweus, 1993). Physical abuse is the least often employed type of victimization for this very reason; it is easier to be caught and the punishments for physical abuse are more severe.

Verbal Abuse.

In addition to physical abuse, there is verbal peer victimization. This includes any communication with another meant to hurt, embarrass, or upset him/her. Direct verbal abuse can include taunting, teasing, and name-calling (Rigby, 1996a). Threats of physical harm are often part of the verbal abuse. Again, this is the most prevalent type of

victimization found in schools; it is hardest for adults to catch and easiest for bullies to deny.

Peer Exclusion.

Lastly, as suggested by many studies (Buhs, Ladd & Herald 2006; Olweus, 1993; Crick & Grotpeter, 1995), another type of peer victimization is peer exclusion. Olweus (1993) uses the term “indirect bullying,” but it is in essence any attempt by the attacker to use social isolation and intentional exclusion from a group to hurt a victim. This can also include harming others through manipulation and purposeful damage to peer relationships (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). Students can manipulate friendships and peer social groups, which often results in causing harm to others. Peer exclusion is the least obvious type of peer victimization; often, it isn’t even recognized by the victim as a type of peer victimization. However, it can cause as much pain to the victim as verbal or physical abuse (Olweus, 1993).

In conclusion, it seems appropriate to consider three distinct types of peer victimization as variables for this study, different from other studies on victimization that tend to lump all victimization into one variable. Physical, verbal, and exclusionary abuse can all have pronounced, negative effects on the victimized students, and as explained each type might have different effects on the victims themselves.

Do different types of peer victimization have different impacts on the victims?

Specifically important for this research project, is the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald study (2006) in which they noted differences in relationships between types of peer victimization and achievement when broken down into two areas: peer abuse and peer exclusion. In a structural equation model, they found stronger negative relationships

between peer abuse and achievement than they did between peer exclusion and achievement. It is the intention of this proposed study to examine those relationships more closely; in particular by breaking peer abuse into verbal, physical, and exclusionary subtypes.

Absenteeism

In modern day education, some students often miss school. Some students avoid school because they don't want to be there for various reasons. Other students miss school because they shouldn't be there. For instance, illness can occur, and the student stays home to recover. Parents are responsible for the absent students at varying levels. Some parents will call their student in "excused" at the plea of their student, and others simply do not monitor their student enough to be aware of their attendance habits. The bottom line is that students need to attend school to learn. Any extreme absenteeism rates have negative impacts on the students' academic achievement, and often, these high incidences of absence rates have negative effects on the teachers, schools, and school districts as well.

Is absenteeism a problem?

Absenteeism is a problem in the modern age. Every day in the United States, hundreds of thousands of students miss school without a legitimate reason (Mogulescu & Segal, 2002). Truancy is a growing concern in public schools. Many schools across the nation are reporting daily attendance rates of less than 80%. When one in five students is gone, educational goals are damaged; missing classes certainly affects student performance. Failed classes, missed skills and knowledge, and general lack of connectedness to school are all the result of excessive absences. In addition, truancy

habits in school years can lead to poor attendance habits in the workplace. Truancy not only leads to decreased academic achievement, but also having youth not in school can lead to problems for public safety. Studies show that 75 to 85% of all serious juvenile offenders have been chronically truant from school (CFFC, 2002). Chronically absent students are at risk for other serious behavioral issues such as drug abuse and serious criminal activity (Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001). Many inner city police departments work directly with school districts on truancy programs as a direct strategy to lower crime.

How does absenteeism affect achievement?

Just as the NCLB Act has put increased emphasis on student achievement as measured by standardized test scores, it has also mandated that schools and school districts also report unexcused absentee rates in their published report cards, and absenteeism is an additional indicator for Adequate Yearly Progress (Colorado Department of Education, 2008). Legislators obviously expect a correlation between attendance and achievement. Any experienced educator understands the connection between consistently high attendance and improved learning.

Douglas Lamdin (1996) studied specifically the effect of attendance rates on student achievement, and possibly decisions around including attendance targets as part of NCLB could be due to the results found in his studies. In essence, Lamdin found significant correlation coefficients between attendance and achievement. Specifically, the correlation coefficients between attendance rate and above average achievement on Reading and Math test scores were .61 and .56 respectively, both significant at the 1% level. Lambdin suggested that falling scores on math and science achievement tests for

high school students could be due to the increased absence and truancy rates of high school students. Typically, a large increase in missed school takes place in grades past the 10th grade because students become responsible for their own transportation, and parental monitoring of schooling decreases. In addition, Clump, Bauer, and Whiteleather (2003) found in a study regarding absences and achievement that lower attendance rates correlated with lower test scores on math and science achievement tests.

It makes substantive sense that students need to be in school to learn. Some students skip school unexcused, and others coerce parents into calling in an excused absence to the school. But ultimately, if students miss school too frequently, achievement is negatively impacted.

How is absenteeism typically measured?

School absenteeism can be reliably and validly measured. Studies needing an absenteeism variable have used total numbers of absences or percentage of classes missed. Assuming records for student attendance are accurately recorded, an absenteeism variable can be easily created. Thus, survey research linking victimization and truancy can be carried out in school settings. Different from the Buhs, Ladd and Herald study (2003) in which the attendance variable was a “School Avoidance” construct, for which students indicated how much they would like to miss school, this study will employ real attendance rates as the absenteeism measure.

School Engagement

Most educators agree that students have differing personal characteristics that either decrease or increase their potential for success in school. Educational researchers

have for a long time attempted to define and measure these characteristics. The construct for these personal characteristics has become known as “school engagement.”

What is school engagement?

School engagement is used in research to describe differences in student learning. Differences in attitudes towards school and behaviors while in school are hopefully captured in a school engagement construct. It is a construct developed to explain differences in student achievement due to these various, potential differing, student characteristics that increase the likelihood of academic success. Much of the research and literature on engagement is an attempt to define the several different factors that explain why some students learn more successfully than others. Students with higher engagement in classroom activities are responding to some environmental factors that improve their functioning in the school setting (Shernoff & Schmidt, 2008). Ultimately, those students deemed as “disengaged” generally have poorer academic outcomes than those students who are “engaged.”

Engagement is considered a multidimensional construct, yet often in studies it is treated as a singular variable. However, in studies in which these different aspects are important to researchers, especially those examining school engagement and achievement, these different aspects are often measured independently and individually. One study using a student engagement variable divided the construct into two different parts: behavior and affect (Finn, 1993). Behavior is mainly how a student participates in class; logically, the more a student participates, the more he/she is engaged, and ultimately, the more likely he/she achieves. Affect is the degree to which the student feels he/she belongs in the academic setting. Elements contributing to higher levels of affect

are the effectiveness and warmth of staff and fellow students' accepting nature. A clear relationship with the other students, teachers, and the overall school culture is a big part of "affect."

A more recent study defined the school engagement construct with three specific areas of focus (Finlay et al., in press). Those engagement areas are the following: behavioral, emotional, and cognitive. The National Center for School Engagement created a 40-item survey that measured each subtype of engagement separately. Fifteen items from that survey were used in the instrument developed for this study.

One other qualitative study very specifically examined engagement and defined engagement with several observable behaviors (Harris, 2008). Cognitive engagement was indicated by learning and psychological behaviors, while emotional engagement was observed with mood and affect indicators. Connection to the school was important for emotional engagement, and specific classroom culture and bonding built cognitive engagement.

From the previous research, it seems most important to recognize school engagement as a multidimensional construct. The design of the survey for this proposed study treats engagement as a multi-faceted construct. It is not adequate to treat engagement as a single measure; but instead, the survey measures three separate parts of engagement using the selected items from the larger 40-item survey constructed by the National Center for School Engagement (Finlay et al., in press). This prevents treating engagement as simply "being well-behaved," but rather looks specifically at what behaviors a student displays that contribute to his/her success in school.

What factors contribute to school engagement?

The National Center for School Engagement view three specific factors that contribute to not only indication of school engagement, but increasing the factors leads to higher school engagement as well (Heilbrunn, 2008). These three factors are attendance, attachment, and achievement. These factors and their relationships are interrelated, but their exact relationships still need to be explored.

Clearly, behavior while in school is an important aspect of being engaged and ready to learn while at school. Teachers want students to behave appropriately while in school. But the proposed three-subtype model of engagement attempts to acknowledge that a student must also be interested, cognitively aware, participating, and excited to get the most out of a learning experience. A multi-aspect view of engagement recognizes that some students better interact with learning materials and teachers to achieve more quickly and efficiently than their peers; this is all part of school engagement.

How is school engagement measured?

School engagement has been measured in many ways in educational research. According to a recent review (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004), there are three widely used conceptualizations of engagement including behavioral engagement, emotional engagement, and cognitive engagement. Indications of behavioral engagement are following rules and norms while in school, giving effort to activities, demonstrating persistence and concentration pertaining to coursework, and participation in school activities. Emotional engagement refers to students' overall interest, school spirit, connectedness to school peers and staff. In addition, emotional engagement is marked by the lack of boredom, anxiety, sadness, and fear while at school. The aforementioned

cognitive engagement refers to strategic thinking concerning problem solving, preference for challenge, and psychological investment in learning. In other words, cognitive engagement is a student's ability to self-regulate his/her investment in the learning process.

Does school engagement affect academic achievement?

Studies demonstrate significant correlations between school engagement variables and academic achievement (Finn, 1993; Finlay et al., in press; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004). Specifically in the Finn study, higher levels of participation indicated higher levels of achievement. Interestingly, gender and race did not have significant interactions with the school engagement variable indicating that a school engagement construct is appropriate for use with any demographic. In addition, the study suggests harmful effects on academic achievement from non-participation or lower engagement levels. It is apparent that more engaged students do better in school.

Structural Equation Modeling

Structural equation models are “a comprehensive statistical approach to testing hypotheses about relations among observed and latent variables” (Hoyle, 1995). Latent variable modeling or (SEM) attempts to define hypothetical latent constructs in terms of measured variables, and then places a structural model to describe the strength of the linear relationships among/between these latent constructs. SEM combines aspects of factor analysis and multiple regression in analyzing the relationships among/between manifest and latent variables simultaneously. Structural equation modeling specifies a model to illustrate the hypothesized model, and uses various fit statistics to evaluate the integrity of that model. SEM allows evaluation of model fit and the contribution of each

independent variable to the dependent variable. SEM is a confirmatory technique that allows the estimation, evaluation, and possible modification of the proposed models for the relationships between the variables of interest. Another strength of structural equation modeling is that one can specify a variable as both a predictor and criterion in the same analysis. In other words, indirect effects of variables can be estimated (Kline, 1998).

The AMOS software program tests the hypothesized structural equation models. The AMOS software package builds the specified models and provides fit indices with which to evaluate these models. With structural equation modeling, statistical estimates of the direct effects of exogenous (independent) variables on endogenous (dependent) variables are represented by path coefficients, which is similar to the concept of regression coefficients in multiple regressions. AMOS provides both path coefficients and fit indices for the researcher-specified models.

There are many criteria and standards used to examine model fit in structural equation modeling. The chi-square statistic for the model is generally the first examined as a measure of fit. For a good fitting model, the chi-square statistic should be nonsignificant at the 5% level. Chi-square for SEM is, in essence, a badness-of-fit statistic, in that a small chi-square statistic corresponds to good fit. In addition, most models are evaluated using root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA). RMSEA measures the “discrepancy per degree of freedom” for a model. RMSEA values below 0.05 indicate a very good fit, and those below 0.08 indicate reasonable fit (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). Two other often used goodness-of-fit statistics are the “comparative fit index” (CFI) and “standardized root-mean-square residual” (SRMR) to evaluate hypothesized models. Generally, a CFI of greater than 0.95 and SRMR of less than 0.05

are recommended as standards for good fit (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993; Kline, 1998).

Relationships modeled via structural equation models are not absolute explanations of variance in the variables of interest; however, some portion of the variation in the dependent variable can be explained by the independent constructs, and fit indices describe the strength of the model in determining how well the independent variables function (Joreskog & Sorbom, 1993). Still, researchers cannot assume causation between two variables despite a high correlation coefficient between those two variables. However, if several additional criteria are met, causal inferences can be made. The following three criteria generally provide evidence for causal inference: (1) *Direction* - one variable should occur before the other, (2) *Association* - two variables must be related to one another (indicated by a correlation), and (3) *Isolation* - the correlations between two variables must not be due to common response to another confounding or lurking variable (Kline, 1998). Isolation is the most difficult of the three criteria to meet; generally, it is presumed that some of the possible confounding or lurking variables were considered in a study, but one can't possibly control for all confounding variables. The criterion of direction is often presumed because of the ordering of the variables in the model, and association is usually established by the correlations between the included variables. Ultimately it is up to the researcher to make substantive observations regarding the requirements needed for causal inference.

Summary

Peer victimization is a problem in modern education. Many victimized students go to schools where others either physically or verbally abuse them, or purposefully exclude them. The negative impacts on the victimized students are many.

Poor attendance is also a problem in modern education. Students are missing school at increased rates; subsequently, achievement is negatively affected. In an age of education defined by accountability, educators need students in school to learn and achieve.

The literature lacks a specific examination of the relationships between peer victimization and attendance. Does peer victimization directly impact attendance that in turn impacts achievement, or does peer victimization influence a student's engagement which in turn leads to lowered attendance finally resulting in lower academic achievement? A limitation of the existing research on peer victimization is the inadequate attention given to the connection between victimization and attendance at school. It may be that a direct link between victimized students and their attendance affects overall achievement, or more likely a combination of direct effects through missed school as well as indirect effects of disengagement from the school environment that leads to less-than-potential achievement.

Expectations of Study

This study attempted to determine if peer victimization significantly impacts student attendance. Much of the research has established the relationships between peer victimization and achievement, self-esteem, and other variables relating to the victimized student; however, the specific relationship between peer victimization and attendance has largely gone unexplored. Structural equation models test the hypothesized relationships between latent and directly observed variables; SEM was the logical analysis technique to test the hypothesized relationships between peer victimization and attendance. The

expectation of this study was that measurement models would provide statistical insight into those relationships.

Method

The purpose of this study was to better understand the relationships between middle school students' victimization frequencies, victimization types, and their school attendance. Then, ultimately, the effects of victimization, attendance, and school engagement on academic achievement were examined. Previous research has examined the relationships between peer victimization, engagement, and achievement (Buhs, Ladd, & Herald, 2006). These researchers evaluated a structural equation model linking different types of maltreatment, resulting change in engagement and "school avoidance," and then, subsequent total academic achievement levels (Figure 1). However, their results suggested that peer victimization and school avoidance do not necessarily have a simple direct relationship, but that the school avoidance latent variable (how much students did not want to be at school) could possibly be mediated by the school engagement, latent component. Simply stated, changes to their model were warranted. As uncovered in the literature review, it is quite possible that peer victimization does not directly cause students to miss more school. Instead, it is reasonable that victimization causes school engagement to decline in victimized students, and in turn, attendance is negatively affected. Ultimately, the more school a student misses, the more likely achievement is negatively affected. So, school engagement may be best viewed as a mediating variable between attendance and academic achievement with an additional direct effect between attendance and achievement included in the model. The main purpose of this study was to determine the strength of the relationships between the variables of interest and to find

the best ordering of the relationships in a structural model.

In addition, previous studies of peer victimization impacts on students have treated the victimization components as single independent variables. Specificity about what types of peer victimization and to what intensity and frequency victimization occurred was not considered. In essence, this study replicated, (with modifications), the study performed by Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006). As seen in Figure 1, their model distinguished between “Chronic Abuse” and “Chronic Exclusion.” The data for this study allowed the inclusion of a distinction between verbal and physical abuse. In addition, this study included a “peer victimization intensity” component, as it was hypothesized that the greater a subject’s perceived intensity of victimization, the greater the subsequent impact on engagement, attendance, and achievement. In addition, the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald study treated the school avoidance variable as a latent variable derived of answers to questions about how much students wanted to avoid school, while this study proposed that including a true attendance variable as the school avoidance measure would better describe the relationship between victimization and attendance. It was hoped that this variable would be more accurate as the scores for students would be directly obtained from school records. Frankly, most students, if asked, would indicate that they would rather not be at school; an actual attendance measure determined if they truly act on that desire.

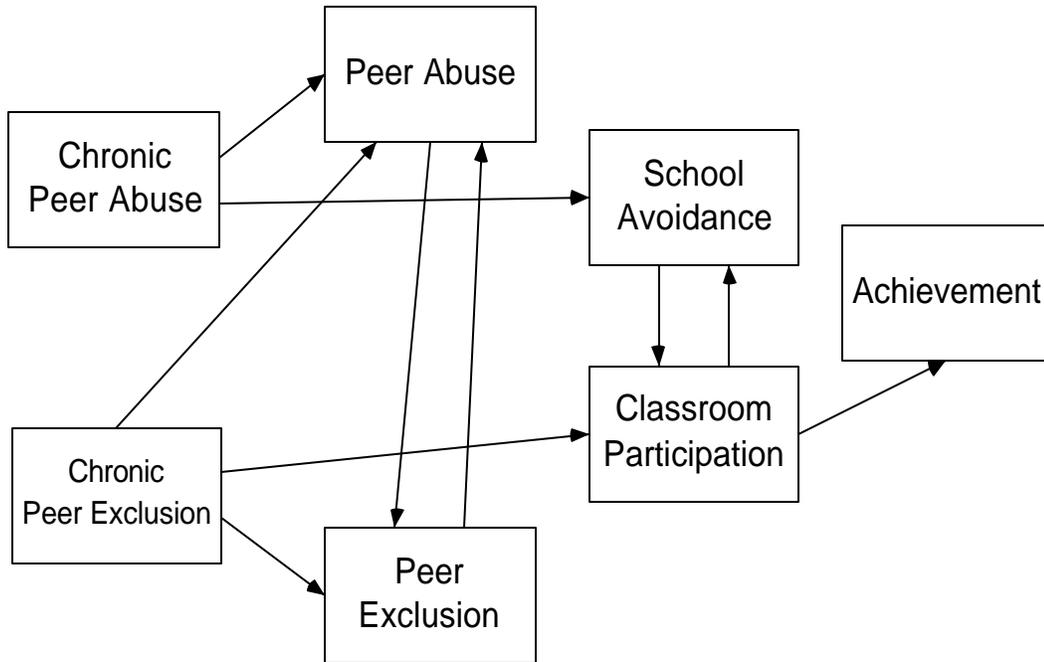


Figure 1. Buhs, Ladd, and Herald (2006) tested this structural equation model relating victimization, participation, avoidance and achievement.

Ultimately, the goal of this study was to formulate and evaluate a framework for the associations between victimization, engagement, attendance, and ultimately, student achievement. It was hypothesized that reordering the student engagement variable and adding specificity about peer victimization behaviors and intensity would improve the fit of the structural model.

A diagram of the proposed hypothetical model for this study is shown in Figure 2. Of course, the purpose of structural equation modeling is to test a set of hypotheses and then use fit statistics to determine the robustness of a particular model. Then, the researcher can make adjustments to the model (based on theory), and see the resulting changes in fit. The model proposed in Figure 2 was only a hypothesis, and it was hoped that modifications after original model fit examination would result in specification of the

strongest relationship between the variables of interest.

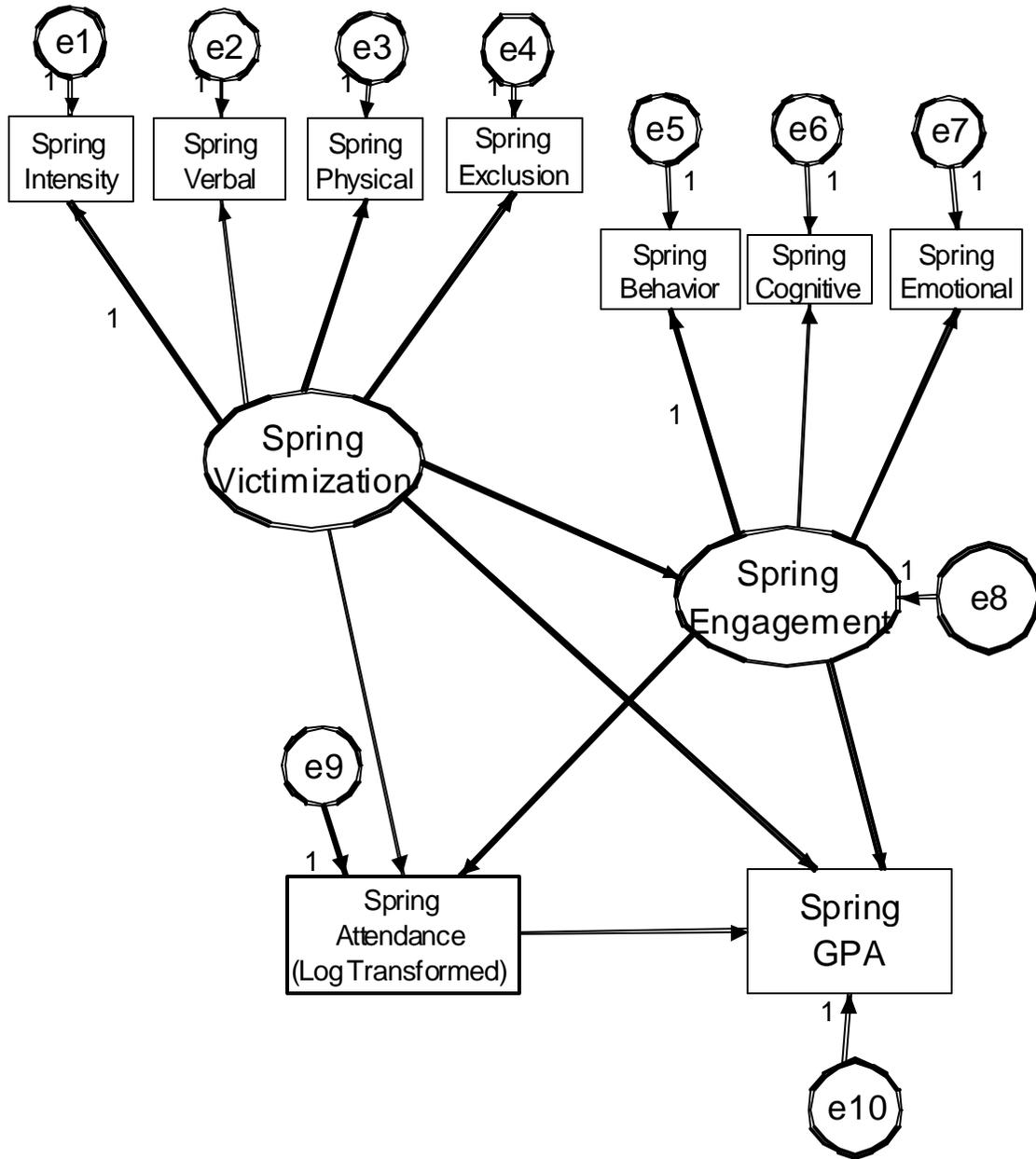


Figure 2. Hypothesized model treating victimization and engagement as multi-dimensional latent constructs, and treating school avoidance as actual school attendance.

As can be seen in Figure 2, it was believed that four different victimization variables better capture a latent representation of victimization to the students. In

addition, it was hypothesized that this latent variable for student victimization would have significant direct effects on attendance, engagement levels, and achievement. Engagement was also treated as a latent variable; the three differing engagement components (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) all combined to form this latent engagement variable. The model also evaluated the direct effect of school engagement on attendance and achievement.

Similar to the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald study, this study modeled the relationships proposed in Figure 2 utilizing survey data. The relationships between peer victimization types, victimization frequencies, and attendance could only be explored with data from a survey designed to get specific information from students about their victimization experiences. However, the differences between this proposed model and the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald model were many. Different from the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald study, the abuse variables for this study were self-reported rather than teacher-reported. It was hypothesized that the victims themselves would better be able to report the type, frequency, and intensity of their own peer victimization experiences. The victimization and engagement variables were treated as latent, with differing and more specific components as well. Lastly, absenteeism was actual school attendance, and achievement was grade point average.

Subjects from a single school district in a large county in Colorado completed the survey questionnaires designed specifically for study of this topic, measuring frequency, type, duration, and intensity of peer victimization as well as the subjects' school engagement. In addition, data on absenteeism (attendance records) and school achievement (cumulative grade point averages) were collected from student records for

each participant.

Definition of Population and Sample

The intended population for this study was all Colorado 6th grade students. The sample data were compiled from a large school district in Adams County, Colorado, a county in the northern metropolitan Denver area. Adams County is one of the ten most populous counties in the state of Colorado. This was a convenience sample; however, the characteristics of the sample lend to possible generalization of the results, as they are similar to the larger intended population (all middle school students) for this study.

According to the 2006 census, there were approximately a half million people, over 100,000 households, and about 90,000 families residing in Adams County at that time. The racial makeup of the county was nearly 80% White, about 3% Black or African-American, and 17% from other races including Native-American, Asian, and Pacific Islander. Approximately 30% of those indicating White race were Hispanic or Latino. The median income for a household in the county was just over \$47,000, and the median income for a family was just over \$52,000. Males had a median income of over \$36,000 versus just over \$28,000 for females. The per capita income for the county was just over \$20,000. Approximately 6.5% of families and 8.9% of the population were below the poverty line, including 10.9% of those under age 18 and 7.3% of those age 65 or over.

As of the 2007 school year, the Adams County 12 Five Star School District operated with a total enrollment of nearly 40,000 students. Approximately 60% of this enrollment was White, 40% minority (including almost 30% Hispanic); these data replicate the demographics of the overall county racial attributes. The overall percentage

of students who qualified for free or reduced lunches was over twenty-five percent, and over fifteen percent of enrolled students were English Language Learners, speaking a total of 71 different languages.

For the 2003-4 school year, the school district labeled a total of 18,996 students (27.68% of the total enrollment) as “truant,” based upon numbers of recorded unexcused absences and the Colorado legal definition. (Under Colorado law, “truant” is defined as four or more unexcused absences in a single month, or 10 unexcused absences in a year.) Recognizing habitual truancy as a risk factor for suspensions, expulsions, dropping out, drug use, and other negative behaviors, Adams County 12 Five Star School District joined with four other school districts in 2005 to form a Truancy Reduction Consortium, in partnership with the local courts, for the purpose of developing truancy prevention and intervention strategies and programs. Clearly, poor attendance is a problem for this particular school district.

Adams County was an ideal location to conduct this study. The school district for Adams County serves a diverse community. The school district includes high, middle, and low SES populations. The percentages of non-White groups in this county mirror the percentages of these groups in Colorado as a whole. Although African-American students make up approximately 15% of public school enrollment, they comprise only 3% of Adams County Schools, but this county does serve to provide a fairly representative sample for purposes of making inferences about Colorado students in general. Most importantly, Adams County 12 Five Star School District forms a fairly representative sample of the type of Colorado schools that deal with truancy at its highest levels. Because of their interest in reducing truancy, the school district in Adams County was

willing to cooperate to collect truancy and victimization data. They wanted to examine the effects of peer victimization on truancy to hopefully provide impetus for positive truancy program changes.

The accessible population for this study were 6th grade middle school students enrolled in the school district. The survey was given to 6th graders rather than 7th and 8th graders to better explain the victimization-absenteeism link. Sixth grade is a transitional year for middle school students during which stable patterns of victimization and school adjustment problems have yet to be formed. It may be more difficult to sort out cause-effect relationship during seventh and eighth grade when the linkage between these relationships has been well established. The participants in this survey were a convenience sample of 6th graders recruited from middle schools agreeing to participate in this study.

The sample for this study consisted of 860 6th grade students from Adams County 12 Five Star School District. The student gender consisted of 46.4% males and 52.1% females. The ethnicity breakdown was as follows: 63.1% White, 29.9% Hispanic, 4.5% Asian, 1.7% Black, and 0.7% other. These percentages reflect many of the ethnic proportions found in urban and suburban school districts in Colorado. The sample does contain a significant “at-risk” proportion. Of the students included, 33.3% receive free- or reduced-lunches while at school. Again, the at-risk population of Adams County 12 Five Star is similar to the proportion found in many of the urban and suburban school districts of Colorado. The similarities were purposeful as the sample was chosen so results of this study can hopefully be generalized to other districts in our state. Table 1 describes the specific sample characteristics.

Table 1.
Sample Categorical Variable Frequencies and Percentages (n=860).

	Frequency	Percent %
Gender		
Male	400	46.4
Female	449	52.1
No Response	11	1.5
Ethnicity		
White	544	63.1
Hispanic	256	29.9
Asian	39	4.5
Black	15	1.7
Other	6	0.7
At-Risk Status		
Free Lunch	210	24.6
Reduced Lunch	75	8.7
Not Applicable	575	66.7

Instrumentation

This study used secondary data analysis. The data for this dissertation were drawn from a survey designed and administered by The Colorado Foundation for Families & Children. The Foundation compiled the results from the survey along with other pertinent variables for each subject included in the study. The Colorado Foundation has a special interest in examining the relationship between victimization and school attendance/achievement. In particular, the Foundation hopes to better understand the relationship between peer victimization and attendance in order to be able to inform and enhance efforts to reduce truancy at a causal level.

Instrument design was based on the need to have self-reported levels of victimization. Other studies examining the link between victimization and truancy have utilized peer reports or teacher reports of victimization levels. As previously discussed, asking students themselves for their perceived levels of victimization was believed to

provide for more accurate identification of those who are truly victims.

The survey measure was developed by a CFFC research team to incorporate an extensive list of variables that included the following constructs: (a) absenteeism, (b) peer victimization, (specifically frequency, duration, intensity of victimization), (c) type of victimization, (d) school engagement, (e) school achievement, and (f) other demographic variables (gender, ethnicity, socio-economic status).

Validity

An instrument is considered valid when it measures what it is supposed to measure. The validity of the survey measure was established prior to administration of the survey by the research team for the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children. The engagement questions were developed by the National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) for the 40-item School Engagement Survey (Finlay et al., in press). The engagement items came from a variety of sources, and team researchers for NCSE categorized them in the areas of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement (Finlay et al., in press). Concurrent validity was established with intercorrelations between the three different engagement subtypes as well.

The victimization items for the survey were borrowed from the University of Illinois Victimization Scale (Espelage & Holt, 2001) to measure the frequency and type of victimization. This original Victimization Scale was developed using results from interviews with students, and the scale was found to converge with peer nomination data indicating convergent validity (Espelage & Holt, 2001). Three distinct victimization factors emerged in the initial analysis of the victimization items (Espelage & Holt, 2001). The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children research team evaluated the face

validity of the items for the peer victimization portion as well as items for the school engagement portion. The instrument went through a thorough peer review process before use to determine adequate validity.

Reliability

The reliabilities of the multiple-item scales used in this study were tested by Cronbach’s alpha, a measure of the internal consistency among multiple-item scales. In essence, Cronbach’s alpha measures the inter-correlation between the sets of scale items for the construct intended for measurement (Sattler, 2001). A Cronbach’s alpha of 0.7 or higher was expected as an indication that the items in the scales were consistently measuring the intended construct (Sattler). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was determined for the following multi-item scales: behavioral engagement, cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, victimization intensity, verbal victimization, and exclusionary victimization. These were the only multi-item scales used in the survey.

Table 2 shows Cronbach’s alpha for the measured scales.

Table 2.
Cronbach’s alpha coefficients for survey items.

Constructs	Cronbach’s α	Items per scale
Behavioral Engagement (Fall)	.750	5
(Spring)	.781	
Cognitive Engagement (Fall)	.774	5
(Spring)	.815	
Emotional Engagement (Fall)	.805	5
(Spring)	.834	
Victimization Intensity (Fall)	.800	15
(Spring)	.832	
Verbal Victimization (Fall)	.852	3
(Spring)	.892	
Exclusionary Victimization (Fall)	.750	3
(Spring)	.768	

Table 2 shows the results of all Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient calculations. From the results, it can be noted that all multiple-item scales have acceptable internal consistency using a standard $\alpha > 0.7$. These scales are sufficiently reliable with Cronbach's alphas ranging from .750 to .892. Interestingly, all reliability coefficients increased for the spring implementation of the survey. This might indicate a change in the students' engagement and victimization levels in the spring compared to the spring.

Data Collection

During the first week of April 2007, a list of all students who had unexcused absences during January, February, and March from each participating middle school was requested. The parents of these students were contacted to request permission for their child's participation in the study. In each middle school, students who had parental permission met in groups of no more than 15 students at an assigned school location during the school day. A graduate student explained the purpose of the study, gave directions on how to fill out each measure, administered the measures, and collected them. For each participating student the following information was obtained from their school records, recorded, and stored in an EXCEL data file: cumulative grade point average for the first three quarters of school, grade level, age, gender, free/reduced lunch participation, and ethnicity.

The survey measure was given to the target sample at two different times during a school year in hopes of obtaining data that could be used to examine longitudinal effects of peer victimization behavior on attendance and achievement. The first wave of surveys was given to approximately 1150 students in October of 2007, and the second survey

wave (identical format) was given to this same set of students in May of 2008.

Unfortunately, this two-wave system led to some attrition of subjects in both waves. For instance, some students who participated in the fall survey were absent or did not participate in the spring survey, and similarly, some students took the survey in the spring but did not participate in the fall. The dataset contained 860 complete student cases after removal of approximately 300 incomplete student cases that had missing data for one of the two survey sessions.

Variables Studied

Although secondary data analysis has the advantage of providing data efficiently, the variables studied must often be created to answer the research questions unique to this type of study. Furthermore, the theoretical model used for the structural equation analysis utilizes several latent variables that can only be represented by either item totals on the survey or a unique combination of observed variables from the survey.

Dependent Variables

For purposes of answering the research questions for this study, one of the dependent variables was student absenteeism. This variable was quantified as the total classes missed to provide greatest variability. Another dependent variable was academic achievement. One major goal of this study was to determine victimization impacts on achievement, so achievement was included in the structural equation model.

Absenteeism: The total number of absences, excused and unexcused, for both the first trimester and the third trimester of the school year were obtained from the school records of each student who participated in the study. Both excused and unexcused absences were included because it was hypothesized that students missing school because

of their peer victimization levels may have been able to convince their parents to call them in as excused, and at this age, few students would be able to have unexcused absences. These two periods (first and third trimester) best represent possible affected attendance rates because they match the time periods in which the surveys were completed. The third trimester absence rate data best served as the absenteeism variable because this time period included the cumulative effects from peer victimization throughout the year. This third trimester absence rate variable was late enough in the school year for peer victimization incidents to have occurred and, as is explained below, measuring absenteeism at this time increased the likelihood that the self-reported victimization incidents occurred before a student's absence due to peer victimization. Absenteeism was treated as a continuous variable.

Academic Achievement: The students' academic achievement measure was grade point average on a four-point scale (F = 0, D = 1, C = 2, B = 3, and A = 4). GPA data for each student were included for both the first trimester and the third trimester, (matching the time periods in which the surveys were administered.) Achievement was treated as a continuous variable.

Independent Variables

Frequency and type of peer victimization: One independent variable was the degree of peer victimization experiences, which included the number of times or frequency that a student experienced peer victimization behaviors while at school or at school-related activities. The survey was created with portions of the University of Illinois Victimization Scale (Espelage & Holt, 2001) to measure the frequency and type of victimization. A variable quantifying "victimization" included the following types of

peer victimization behaviors: verbal, physical, and exclusion (See Appendix C). Items 18-24). Examples of each victimization type were the following: “Other students called me names” (verbal); “Other students spread rumors about me” (verbal); “I got hit and pushed by other students” (physical); “I am often left out of activities” (exclusion). Frequencies for a student who was victimized were determined by totaling the responses to the five choices on the survey. Students were asked to indicate the type of peer victimization that they experienced and how frequently this occurred (never; 1 or 2 times, 3 or 4 times, 5 or 6 times, 7 or more times) since the beginning of the school year. It was believed that totaling the responses to these victimization-type variables best served to create a frequency variable because greater numbers indicate more frequent victimization incidents. Students were asked about these behaviors during a specific time frame (“over the past 30 days”) in order to insure that victimization occurred before or concurrently with absenteeism. Frequency of peer victimization was treated as a continuous variable.

Intensity of victimization: This construct was measured in the original survey by having students check 15 different indicators of their feelings attributed to the victimization (See Appendix C, Item 26). For example, students were asked to check whether they experienced the following: “I was afraid while I was in school”; “I felt embarrassed and ashamed”; “I avoided going to places where there was no adult supervision.” There were 15 such “Intensity” measuring statements. The total out of fifteen for each student served as the victimization intensity measure. Intensity of peer victimization was treated as a continuous variable.

School engagement was measured using the NCSE School Engagement Survey (Finlay et al., in press). This is a 40-item survey that measures behavioral, emotional, and

cognitive school engagement. For this survey, 5 items from each of the school engagement indicators were selected for inclusion (See Appendix C, Items 3-17). Totals in each of the engagement areas served as the measure for each student in behavioral, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Each school engagement subtype was treated as a continuous variable.

Table 3 provides a list of both dependent and independent variables including a description of the variable measurement method; in all, the study included two dependent and three independent variables.

Table 3.
Description of Variables Included in Study.

Variable Construct	Measurement Method
<u>Dependent Variables</u>	
Absenteeism	Total Absences per Trimester
Academic Achievement	Grade Point Average (4 point scale)
<u>Independent Variables</u>	
Victimization Frequency (3 Subtypes)	Total of 7 victimization scale items
1. Verbal	3 items
2. Physical	1 item
3. Exclusion	3 items
Victimization Intensity	Total of 15 intensity items
School Engagement (3 Subtypes)	Total of 15 engagement items
1. Cognitive	5 items
2. Behavioral	5 items
3. Emotional	5 items

Data Integrity

The original data for the surveys were entered into EXCEL worksheets. Before

statistical analyses could be run the data from the two different EXCEL worksheets needed to be combined into a single SPSS data file. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board for the University of Denver, the data were merged into a single file. Student identification numbers were used to merge the two datasets together so that cases matched.

Data missingness

In addition, before any statistical analysis was conducted, a thorough data cleaning process was utilized. This included combining the spring and fall data, dealing with missing data, and creating several latent variable constructs. Cases from the dataset that did not include data from either of the two survey sessions were deleted for final analysis leaving a total of 860 cases. Data missingness resulted in deletion of many cases from the study. The original dataset included 1009 cases. 149 of those cases were missing either the fall or spring responses to the survey. Listwise deletion resulted in the loss of 14.8% of total cases. Two approaches are generally used to address data missingness: data imputation and data deletion. Due to the longitudinal nature of the study, data imputation did not seem reasonable for those cases with either fall or spring missing data. Data imputation can be considered when data are missing at random (MAR) or missing completely at random (MCAR) (Allison, 2001). Data missing at random do not depend on the item values, and data missing completely at random do not depend on other values of items or the specific item values (Allison, 2001). After examining patterns of data missingness for these students, it was determined that they did not merely have a few missing responses, but entire fall or spring survey series of responses. In other words, data were not missing at random (MNAR); fall or spring survey items determined data

missingness. Imputation would have been for 50% of the data for students with missing data. So, it was predicted that data imputation would introduce bias into the analyses. Imputation did not seem like a statistically sound decision, and the loss of power attributed to data deletion did not appear to be a problem as the total cases was still 860 students.

The data were also screened for outliers. Variable frequencies and histograms of each variable demonstrated that no out of range responses or outliers existed in the database for the cases remaining after listwise deletion of incomplete cases.

Procedures

To answer the proposed research questions, many data analysis techniques were employed. Data were entered in SPSS and analyzed using simple correlational and multiple-regression statistical routines. Each student in the study was given a score for total absences, frequency and intensity of victimization, GPA, as well as totals for school engagement levels in each of three areas (cognitive, behavioral, and emotional). In addition, student ages, codes for gender, student ethnicity, and free or reduced lunch participation were included. Descriptive statistics were computed for quantitative variables. Using absenteeism and GPA as dependent measures, and all remaining measures as predictors, the researcher explored the strength of various predictive models of absenteeism using multiple regression analyses.

Descriptive Statistics

SPSS was used to compute simple univariate descriptive statistics such as means and standard deviations for all variables. Demographic characteristics of this sample were computed in order to compare them to the characteristics of the general Adams County

sixth grade population. In addition, data were disaggregated in order to determine similarities and differences in the relationship between victimization, school engagement, absenteeism, and achievement for students of different genders.

Correlation

The relationships between peer victimization frequency and types and subsequent school outcomes were analyzed in several ways. SPSS was used to calculate simple bivariate correlations. These correlations were used to build the structural equation model. In addition, plots showing the linearity of bivariate relationships and normality of univariate measures were used to check that the data met the assumptions necessary for the analyses included in the study. Simple correlations were computed between all victimization measures of type, frequency, and intensity, and measures of attendance, engagement, and achievement for both fall and spring assessment periods.

Regression

To explore the question of whether fall victimization has a negative impact on attendance, achievement, and engagement, three sets of regression analyses were computed. The first set of equations examined the extent to which fall and spring absenteeism could be predicted from fall and spring victimization levels and intensity. Conversely, a second group of equations was examined to determine if fall and spring absenteeism could be predicted from fall and spring engagement levels. A third equation examined the relationship between the peer victimization variables and the student engagement variables.

SEM Model

In order to answer the question of whether the impact of victimization on school

outcome measures of attendance and achievement is mediated by school engagement, a hypothesized pattern of linkages among all measured variables was constructed (peer abuse, peer exclusion, school engagement, attendance, achievement), and structural equation modeling (SEM) provided an evaluation of the fit of the hypothesized structural models to the data.

This study examined a relationship in which the frequency and type of victimization and other social variables were presumed to result in a change in attendance and engagement, and then consequently a change in achievement. Structural equation modeling was used to examine this theoretical model and its accompanying proposed hypotheses. We determined whether the path coefficients between peer victimization and student attendance were significant. In addition, the model was constructed to determine if school engagement and peer victimization variables were better treated as latent constructs rather than directly measured variables, with engagement serving as a mediating variable for the effect of the victimization variables on attendance and achievement. Finally, a model controlling for the fall survey data was assessed for fit.

For this study, the indirect effect of peer victimization on school engagement and subsequent indirect effects of school engagement on attendance were considered. The study attempted to determine if a direct negative relationship between peer victimization intensity/frequency and attendance exists, or whether an indirect effect of peer victimization intensity/frequency on attendance through a mediating variable like school engagement was more likely.

Model development was guided by several objectives. First, the study hoped to determine, more clearly, the effect of peer victimization on achievement, (whether it

impacts attendance directly, or is mediated through school engagement.) The researcher looked to determine whether student maltreatment caused truancy directly, or if engagement was an intervening agent. Also, the degree to which absences and lowered school engagement affect achievement was assessed. In addition, by breaking victimization into three different types (verbal, physical, and exclusion), a better understanding of how type of peer victimization impacts the degree to which students are affected was determined. Different types of victimization impact different aspects of students' affect leading ultimately to negative effects on student achievement. The path coefficients between the indicator variables and the latent variables would describe the strength of the relationship between the differing types of victimization, differing types of engagement, and the latent constructs they combine to form.

Summary

This chapter provided a description of the (a) population, (b) sample, (c) survey instrument, (d) data collection procedures, (e) variables included, (f) data integrity associated with the dataset, and (g) data analysis procedures that were used to produce this quantitative study.

There were thirteen primary research questions guiding this study. The first several questions were designed to explore the nature of engagement and victimization in schools. The next grouping of several questions explored the specific connections between self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism via the use of simple correlations between the peer victimization frequency variables, engagement variables, and the attendance variable. The correlation coefficients between all of the different two

variable relationships indicated the strength of the relationship between the different variables.

The third grouping of research questions, addressing the specific connections between type and frequency of victimization and total absences, were answered through the use of multiple regressions. The significances of the duration and frequency of victimization variables in prediction of attendance were assessed as a precursor to the structural equation portion of the study. The regression analyses prior to the structural equation modeling aspect served to facilitate the building of the model itself. Correct paths were deduced with the relationships suggested by the regression analyses.

The last several research questions basically looked to establish if differing structural equation models would fit the data. To determine possible relationships between the variables of interest, the fits of two different structural models were evaluated after the measurement model treating peer victimization and school engagement as latent constructs was assessed. The proposed theoretical constructs of the relationships between peer victimization frequency, peer victimization intensity, school engagement, and attendance were tested. The significance of lowered engagement levels as a consequence of peer victimization was compared to the significance of attendance due to victimization.

All of the research questions were answered using data from the Colorado Foundation for Families and Children survey administered to the Adams County 6th grade student sample in the fall of 2007 and spring of 2008.

Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the specific relationships between peer victimization frequencies and types with attendance, while also considering school engagement levels and academic achievement. This chapter includes descriptive information about the data as well as the results of the correlational analyses, multiple regressions, and structural equation modeling portions of the study. Frequency tables and means and standard deviations were constructed for all variables included in the analyses.

Research Question #1

What frequencies of peer victimization behaviors do 6th grade students experience as middle school students?

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics for the fall portion of the survey to demonstrate the frequency of peer victimization as well as averages for each victimization prompt. Survey items 18-24 were intended to assess the frequency of victimization behaviors faced by the students over time. The survey asked how often the students had faced victimization behavior over the last 30 days, and the five possible frequency choices for the students to choose from were the following: “Never,” “1 or 2 times,” “3 or 4 times,” “5 or 6 times,” and “7 or more.” Responses were coded as “Never”=0, “1 or 2 times”=1, “3 or 4 times”=2, “5 or 6 times”=3, and “7 or more”=4. Although the averages for each item being under 1 ($M=.76, .74, .78, .54, .46, .46, .75$) indicated that perhaps overall students did not often face victimization behaviors, the frequency percentages and the standard deviations of the items indicated that a number of students are victims often enough to cause concern. Considering the definition of victimization includes the criteria that the victim experiences multiple attacks, for each

victimization item, the percent who qualify as victims totaled from a low of 9.5% to a high of 18.3%. Also, these totals didn't include students who indicated a response of "1" which means they faced victimization 1 or 2 times; some of these students, by the typically accepted definition of victimization, would qualify as victims as well. As many as 1 in 5 students felt victimized multiple times in the various types of victimization over the previous 30 days to the survey.

Another trend displayed in Table 4 is that the verbal victimization subtype was clearly the type most often faced by students. Students reported that they had been called names by other students multiple times (18.2%), and 18.3% indicated that they had been "picked on" multiple times as well. The lowest frequencies were found in the "exclusion" items with only 9.8% indicating that other students had excluded them, and only 9.5% indicating others had left them out of activities. The one "physical" item on the survey indicated students are somewhat frequently being physically abused with 12.2% indicating they faced this type of victimization multiple times over the previous 30 days.

Table 4.

Descriptive Statistics - Fall Peer Victimization Experiences by Victim (n=860).

Item	Description	*0	1	2	3	4	M	SD
18	Other students picked on me	57.0	24.7	9.3	3.0	6.0	.76	1.12
19	Other students made fun of	55.1	27.2	10.3	2.9	4.4	.74	1.05
20	Other students called me	55.0	26.9	8.4	4.3	5.5	.78	1.12
21	I got hit and pushed	66.4	21.3	7.3	1.7	3.2	.54	.94
22	Other students excluded me	71.9	18.3	4.5	2.7	2.6	.46	.90
23	Others left me out of	71.3	19.1	4.2	3.0	2.3	.46	.89
24	Other students said bad	57.7	24.0	9.5	3.4	5.5	.75	1.11

Note. *0=Never, 1=1 or 2 times, 2=3 or 4 times, 3=5 or 6 times, 4=7 or more. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

Table 5 provides the descriptive statistics for the same victimization items on the survey, but for the spring implementation of the survey. The means for each of the

victimization items increased slightly for the spring survey, an indication that perhaps more students faced frequent victimization behaviors in the spring than in the fall.

Although the means for the victimization items appear to go up from fall to spring, the responses by items have about the same order by victimization type. In other words, “verbal” attacks are the most frequently reported, while “exclusion” has the least number of incidents, and physical victims were moderately reported, somewhere between verbal and exclusion subtypes.

Table 5.
Descriptive Statistics - Spring Peer Victimization Experiences by Victim (n=860).

Item	Description	*0	1	2	3	4	M	SD
18	Other students picked on me	48.4	28.2	11.1	4.9	7.4	.95	1.21
19	Other students made fun of	44.2	32.1	11.1	4.9	7.7	1.00	1.2
20	Other students called me	45.0	30.8	11.0	5.8	7.3	1.0	1.21
21	I got hit and pushed	63.8	22.1	7.8	2.7	3.6	.60	.99
22	Other students excluded me	66.6	23.4	4.5	3.4	2.1	.51	.90
23	Others left me out of	68.7	21.4	5.6	2.7	1.6	.47	.85
24	Other students said bad	45.2	30.0	10.6	6.1	8.0	1.02	1.24

Note. *0=Never, 1=1 or 2 times, 2=3 or 4 times, 3=5 or 6 times, 4=7 or more. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

In summary, 6th grade students faced various victimization behavior frequencies. The means and standard deviations for the items indicated that some students face no victimization behaviors, while others faced considerable victimization behaviors, enough to warrant the examination of the possible effects of these victimization behaviors. Subsequent analyses were intended to examine the specific impacts of victimization on their school conduct including attendance and engagement. In sum, the data provided evidence that some students are experiencing significant peer victimization behaviors in middle school.

Research Question #2

What intensity of peer victimization behaviors do 6th grade students experience as middle school students?

Items 26A-26P in Table 6 addressed the intensity of the victimization behaviors on the victims themselves from the fall survey. Students were asked to identify from the 16 items which ones they had experienced over the last 30 days. The table lists percentages for each item, and a total of the items overall served as the “Intensity” variable for other analyses in this study. The top three most responded to items were, “I felt embarrassed” at 22.9%, “I felt alone” at 20.6%, and disturbingly, “I wanted to hurt people” at 22.3%. It is extremely unfortunate that so many students felt moved to violence because of the victimization they experience at school. Pertinent to this particular study, the lowest percentage was for item 26D, “I missed school because of fear” with only 1.0% responding yes to this item. Students do not feel they are missing school because of their varying victimization levels to a great degree. Very few (3.2%) avoided using the bathroom during school, and fewer yet (2.8%) would break out in a sweat during school because of their perceived victimization levels. The percentages ranged from 1.0% to 22.9% for the different “intensity” indicators demonstrating that the students are impacted at different intensity levels by their victimization.

Table 6.
Descriptive Statistics for Fall Peer Victimization Intensity by Victims (n=860).

Item #	Description	% Yes
26A	I worried about going to school	13.8
26B	I was afraid to go to school	8.8
26C	I was afraid while I was in school	8.5
26D	I missed school because of fear	1.0
26E	I felt physically sick	7.8
26F	I felt bad about myself	18.0
26G	I felt embarrassed	22.9
26H	I was angry at myself	8.7
26I	I wanted to hurt people	22.3

26J	I felt alone	20.6
26K	I was very nervous	19.6
26L	I would break down in a sweat	2.8
26M	I avoided places in school	6.0
26N	I avoided going to the bathroom	3.2
26O	I was unable to concentrate	13.7
26P	I did badly on tests	9.7

Table 7 indicates that the item totals for students were on average less than 2 ($M=1.87$). Although the percentages for each item indicated as many as 23% of the student responded “yes” to some of the items, an average for students of less than 2 suggested that, overall, students’ behaviors and attitudes were not affected greatly by victimization. It also appeared that females’ behaviors were more affected than males’ with an average total of 2.07 compared to their male counterparts with an average at 1.64. Males could be subject to fewer victimization incidents, or perhaps, males are less likely to respond to the victimization items in the surveys.

Table 7.
Descriptive Statistics for Fall Peer Victimization Intensity by Totals (n=860).

	M	SD
Males	1.64	2.29
Females	2.07	2.68
Total	1.87	2.51

Note. Average total for Intensity is out of 16 items.

Table 8 includes descriptive statistics for the “intensity” variable for the spring survey for comparison purposes with the fall survey. Again, there was a wide range of percentages responding “yes” to the items, from as low as 2.4% responding “yes” to the, “I missed school because of fear” item to as high as 29.5% to the, “I felt embarrassed” item. Interestingly, most items appeared to increase slightly compared to the fall survey responses. This echoed the increase in the frequency of victimization responses from fall

to spring noted in the analysis of descriptive statistics in response to research question one. “I felt bad about myself” and “I felt embarrassed” were the two items with the largest percentage increases, suggesting that perhaps continuation of victimization levels over time lowered students’ self-esteem.

Table 8.
Descriptive Statistics for Spring Peer Victimization Intensity by Victims (n=860).

Item #	Description	% Yes
26A	I worried about going to school	13.7
26B	I was afraid to go to school	8.4
26C	I was afraid while I was in school	9.4
26D	I missed school because of fear	2.4
26E	I felt physically sick	10.0
26F	I felt bad about myself	24.6
26G	I felt embarrassed	29.5
26H	I was angry at myself	14.3
26I	I wanted to hurt people	26.7
26J	I felt alone	24.2
26K	I was very nervous	19.0
26L	I would break down in a sweat	4.2
26M	I avoided places in school	9.9
26N	I avoided going to the bathroom	5.3
26O	I was unable to concentrate	16.4
26P	I did badly on tests	13.6

The spring averages for victimization “intensity” items echoed the percentage increases for most items as both the mean for males and females increased. The means by gender increased, the same amount, about 0.5, suggesting that there are no gender differences in the increase of “intensity” over time. Table 9 describes the means and standard deviations for the peer victimization intensity totals for students.

Table 9.
Descriptive Statistics for Spring Peer Victimization Intensity by Totals (n=860).

	M	SD
Males	2.08	2.90
Females	2.50	2.94

Total	2.31	2.93
-------	------	------

Note. Average total for Intensity is out of 26 items.

In summary, students ranged widely on the intensity level of their victimization at school. Although overall low average numbers of “yes” responses to the items in this section of the survey indicated that few students display behaviors that point to intense victimization, still, many students marked multiple “yes” responses. In addition, some of the items had percentage “yes” responses of over 20%, suggesting that victimization was causing problems for some students. Most interesting for this study was the fact that so few students indicated that they chose to miss school because of fear of victimization. If the students did not feel they were choosing to miss school out of fear, logically, attendance rates would not be directly predictable from victimization levels in the regression equation portion of this study. In sum, several of the intensity items indicated students were facing severe levels of peer victimization intensity.

Research Question #3

What are the levels of school engagement for 6th grade students in middle school?

The data provided evidence that the students had differing levels of engagement in each of the three engagement subtypes, and students reported themselves as mostly engaged at school. Tables 10, 11, and 12 provide descriptive statistics for the engagement items include in the survey. Because the overall engagement has been divided into 3 different aspects (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional), the tables break up the engagement variable into those three components as well. Students were asked to respond to a series of 15 different engagement items (5 items for each subtype of engagement), indicating whether they “Never/Almost Never”, “Rarely”, “Sometimes”, “Often”, or

“Always” display the described behavior. The responses were coded as follows: “Never/Almost Never”=1, “Rarely”=2, “Sometimes”=3, “Often”=4, or “Always”=5. At first glance, the obvious observation was that students had high levels of engagement. For most engagement items, the two highest frequencies came in the categories of “Often” and “Always.” This suggested that, for the most part, students felt they were usually displaying engaged behaviors while at school. Averages for all engagement items ranged from 3.29 to 4.78 supporting this observation as well.

In the “behavioral” component of engagement, the mean level of engagement for all items was above 4. Survey items 3-7 were intended to assess the level of behavioral engagement with items addressing preparedness, work ethic, and following rules. The only two items that showed slightly lower levels of engagement were “I come to class prepared” and “I complete my work.” Both of these items had significant responses of “Sometimes,” 12.8% and 19.6% respectively. This seemed to be indicative of the typical middle school student and varying levels of work ethics amongst them. But again, for the most part, students viewed themselves as behaviorally engaged.

Table 10.
Descriptive Statistics for Fall School Engagement (Behavioral) (n=860).

Item	Description	1*	2	3	4	5	M	SD
3	I come prepared to class	0.5	0.2	12.8	46.5	40.0	4.25	.72
4	I treat classmates with	0.2	1.0	6.7	34.3	57.7	4.48	.69
5	I complete my work	0.5	3.1	19.6	42.2	36.5	4.09	.85
6	I treat teachers with respect	0.1	0.3	3.0	14.8	81.7	4.78	.51
7	I follow rules at school	0.0	1.2	6.8	27.7	64.2	4.55	.67

Note. *1=Never/Almost Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

The “Cognitive” component of engagement had more variability than the “Behavioral” component; the responses were more widely spread across possible student

answers. Items 8-12 were intended to assess students' cognitive engagement addressing their interest in work and people they work with at school. "I feel excited by school work" and "I talk with people at school" had the two lowest averages, indicating that students generally lacked excitement about their work at school, and they weren't talking to other students about their work while at school. However, the vast majority felt they were usually learning while in school, with that item averaging 4.39.

Table 11.

Descriptive Statistics for Fall School Engagement (Cognitive) (n=860).

Item	Description	1*	2	3	4	5	M	SD
8	I feel excited by school	5.0	13.7	40.6	28.8	11.9	3.29	1.01
9	I am interested in school	3.7	10.0	38.7	29.5	18.1	3.48	1.02
10	I talk with people at school	12.3	15.9	25.7	23.3	22.9	3.29	1.31
11	I check my work for	4.1	11.5	25.4	34.5	24.6	3.64	1.09
12	I learn a lot in my classes	1.2	2.2	10.1	29.5	57.1	4.39	.84

Note. *1=Never/Almost Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

Similar to the "Cognitive" component of engagement, the "Emotional" component of engagement had more variability than the "Behavioral" component. Items 13-17 were intended to assess the student's emotional investment in school. Items addressed how students felt about their teachers and how much they enjoyed the school environment. All means indicated responses between 3 and 4 indicating students felt they generally like their schoolwork and their teachers. However, the higher variability on these items indicated that some students did not feel an emotional connection to their schoolwork or their teachers.

Table 12.

Descriptive Statistics for Fall School Engagement (Emotional) (n=860).

Item	Description	1*	2	3	4	5	M	SD
13	I enjoy the school work I	4.8	11.3	35.2	34.8	14.0	3.40	1.01
14	I feel teachers help me	7.2	10.6	26.0	26.0	30.3	3.64	1.21
15	My classroom is fun	4.4	9.5	32.1	30.4	22.5	3.56	1.07

16	My teachers praise me	4.6	8.9	23.1	32.6	30.7	3.75	1.12
17	My teachers understand me	3.8	6.5	18.9	37.8	32.9	3.89	1.06

Note. *1=Never/Almost Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

As all other survey items indicated that the victimization frequencies and victimization intensity increased from the fall to the spring surveys, it was not surprising that the engagement variables suggested an overall decrease in engagement over that same time period. Most engagement items' means did somewhat decrease in the spring surveys indicating an overall decrease in engagement over that same time. Tables 13, 14, and 15 provide descriptive statistics for the spring engagement items.

In the "Behavioral" items, an increase in the percentage of students responding that they "Sometimes" were prepared for class and completed their work could speak to the typical decrease in engagement for students in the second half of the school year. The mean for, "I treat classmates with respect" decreased the most of all items in this category, suggesting students did not get along with each other as much in the spring as they did in the fall.

Table 13.

Descriptive Statistics for Spring School Engagement (Behavioral) (n=860).

Item	Description	1*	2	3	4	5	M	SD
3	I come prepared to class	0.2	1.4	13.2	45.1	40.0	4.23	.75
4	I treat classmates with	0.2	0.8	11.4	44.5	43.0	4.29	.72
5	I complete my work	0.7	4.6	25.4	41.0	28.3	3.92	.88
6	I treat teachers with respect	0.3	0.5	5.2	21.4	72.5	4.65	.63
7	I follow rules at school	0.3	1.9	14.4	34.7	48.7	4.30	.81

Note. *1=Never/Almost Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

Comparing fall to spring items in the "Cognitive" category, one can see that the means for each item lowered as well. Again, cognitive engagement and the other subtypes of engagement decreased over time. The biggest drop was in the, "I feel excited

by school work” item. Students were cognitively less interested in school in the spring than they were in the fall.

Table 14.

Descriptive Statistics for Spring School Engagement (Cognitive) (n=860).

Item	Description	1*	2	3	4	5	M	SD
8	I feel excited by school	8.6	18.9	40.5	23.8	8.2	3.04	1.05
9	I am interested in school	6.4	16.6	39.4	25.9	11.7	3.20	1.05
10	I talk with people at school	13.9	18.6	23.6	24.5	19.4	3.17	1.32
11	I check my work for	5.3	15.1	28.8	32.7	18.1	3.43	1.12
12	I learn a lot in my classes	1.2	2.8	12.3	38.9	44.8	4.24	.866

Note. *1=Never/Almost Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

As with the other two categories of engagement, the “Emotional” category items all dropped slightly in the spring survey. Students were less satisfied with their schoolwork and teachers than they were in the fall. Many students felt they were “rarely” helped or praised by their teachers, with 16.1% and 12.8% responding “rarely” in those two items respectively. And, 15.5% rarely enjoyed their schoolwork. The “Emotional” category of engagement had the greatest decrease across time from fall to spring, and the least amount of engagement came from this category overall as well.

Table 15.

Descriptive Statistics for Spring School Engagement (Emotional) (n=860).

Item	Description	1*	2	3	4	5	M	SD
13	I enjoy the school work	6.6	15.5	42.7	25.2	10.0	3.16	1.02
14	I feel teachers help me	9.4	16.1	22.2	26.9	25.3	3.43	1.28
15	My classroom is fun	8.0	12.1	38.0	25.9	16.0	3.30	1.12
16	My teachers praise me	4.2	12.8	26.3	31.2	25.5	3.61	1.12
17	My teachers understand	6.7	10.0	21.5	34.8	27.0	3.65	1.17

Note. *1=Never/Almost Never, 2=Rarely, 3=Sometimes, 4=Often, 5=Always. Numbers in cells represent percentages of respondents.

In conclusion, students showed widely varying levels of engagement overall. The responses to the items varied considerably. A clear trend in which spring engagement decreased in comparison to fall engagement became apparent in a comparison between

the two survey implementations. Students seemed least engaged in the category of “Emotional” engagement, which included items regarding their enjoyment of schoolwork and teachers. Students seemed most engaged in the category of “Behavioral” engagement, which included items regarding their behavior specific to following rules and treating other students appropriately. Their higher responses to the “Behavioral” items might be attributed to their desire to do well in school overall.

Research Question #4

What are the relationships between frequency of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism?

Table 16 presents the correlations between the frequency totals of each type victimization experience and student attendance. The correlations between the different types of victimization were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level; however, the correlations between total absences and the three different victimization types were not statistically significant. The significant positive correlations found between the peer victimization variables were the following: exclusion and physical $r = .431$, exclusion and verbal $r = .626$, and physical and verbal $r = .471$. This suggests that students who were victims of one type of victimization were victims of other types as well. The statistically nonsignificant correlations between the frequency of the three different victimization types and attendance suggested that lower attendance rates were not related to a degree that will allow prediction of attendance rates from frequency of victimization. These nonsignificant correlations between the victimization variables and absenteeism supported the findings in the “Intensity” variable that students did not perceive that they were missing school because of victimization.

The mean for absenteeism of 36.71 explained that on average students were missing about 37 class periods during the fall trimester. However, the large standard deviation of 32.63 indicates that students varied greatly on the number of classes they missed. This large standard deviation suggested that many students missed very few class periods, while some students missed many.

Table 16.
*Pearson Correlation for Frequency of Victimization & Absenteeism (n=860).
(Fall)*

	Absenteeism	Physical	Exclusion	Verbal
Absenteeism	--	.003	.036	.048
Physical		--	.431**	.471**
Exclusion			--	.626**
Verbal				--
<i>M</i>	36.71	.54	1.66	2.29
<i>SD</i>	32.63	.94	2.38	2.89

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The same correlations for victimization type frequencies and absenteeism are provided for the spring survey (Table 17). Again, all three victimization types were not statistically significantly correlated with absenteeism. However, the three different victimization types were significantly correlated with each other. All three statistically significant correlations for victimization type increased from their fall survey counterparts. The significant positive correlation between physical and exclusion was $r=.501$, between physical and verbal was $r=.593$, and between verbal and exclusion was $r=.692$. The high positive correlation between verbal abuse and exclusion may be indicative that the two variables are likely interrelated. In other words, exclusion can take place by verbal attacks, and many verbal attacks include exclusion.

The verbal victim total had a mean of 2.29 indicating that on average students were victims of verbal harassment (using the definition that students must be victimized

more than one time to be classified a true victim). The standard deviation for this variable of 2.89 demonstrated that many students had no verbal victimization, while some students experienced verbal victimization 7 or more times. Physical victimization had a mean of only .54 indicating that on average students were not facing physical abuse.

The Pearson correlation coefficients did not seemingly change much from fall to spring as demonstrated in Table 17. The victimization types were all still significantly positively correlated, while absenteeism was not significantly correlated with any abuse type. The mean number of classes missed rose significantly from 36.71 in the fall trimester to 53.09 in the spring trimester. This increase was attributed to a combination of more class periods total in the spring and an increase in missed school by students as the year progressed.

Table 17.
Pearson Correlation for Frequency of Victimization & Absenteeism (n=860). (Spring)

	Absenteeism	Physical	Exclusion	Verbal
Absenteeism	--	.007	.041	.044
Physical		--	.501**	.593**
Exclusion			--	.692**
Verbal				--
<i>M</i>	53.09	.60	2.00	2.94
<i>SD</i>	44.19	.99	2.49	3.28

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The fact that the three types of victimization did not have significant correlations with absenteeism made it likely that the peer victimization frequency construct would not have predictive power for absenteeism. This suggested that the victimization levels had no effect on absenteeism. However, the mean number of classes missed by students seemed to be significant, and more exploration into the root causes of absenteeism was warranted. In sum, the data revealed that none of the correlations between the three types

of self-reported victimization and absenteeism were significant at the $p < .05$ level.

Research Question #5

What is the relationship between intensity of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism rate?

Correlation coefficients for the victimization type totals and absenteeism were not statistically significant, so as expected, the correlation between victimization intensity and absenteeism was not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level either. The total number of intensity items was 15 items, so a mean total of those items of only 2.51 indicated that many students did not find changes in their own behavior based on the intensity of their own victimization. The nonsignificant correlation between absenteeism and victimization intensity ($r = .029$) suggested that the regression models would find intensity nonsignificant for predicting absenteeism similar to the peer victimization frequency variables as discussed previously. Table 18 provides the correlation coefficient between victimization intensity and absenteeism.

Table 18.
Pearson Correlation for Intensity of Victimization & Absenteeism (n=860).
(Fall)

	Absenteeism	Intensity
Absenteeism	--	.029
Intensity		--
<i>M</i>	36.71	1.87
<i>SD</i>	32.63	2.51

Table 19 describes the correlation between the spring victimization intensity variable and absenteeism. As found for the fall survey, the spring relationship was not statistically significant. Seemingly, the only major difference between the fall and spring

data was the fact the average total absences in the spring increased from the fall. Again, this was likely due in part to the fact that the third trimester included more school days, so the possibility of missing more days on average increases. The victimization intensity total increased from fall to spring.

Table 19.
*Pearson Correlation for Intensity of Victimization & Absenteeism (n=860).
 (Spring)*

	Absenteeism	Intensity
Absenteeism	--	.036
Intensity		--
<i>M</i>	53.09	2.32
<i>SD</i>	44.19	2.51

None of the included peer victimization variables were significantly correlated with absenteeism. The correlation coefficient between victimization intensity and absenteeism was determined to be not statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. This was contrary to one of the major hypotheses for this study - that victimization affects students' attendance. Students indicated in their surveys that they did not miss school because of victimization levels, and the statistically nonsignificant correlations indicated that they were not missing school because of their victimization levels either. It appeared a premise of this study (that victimization could possibly directly influence attendance) was not true.

Research Question #6

What are the relationships between levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement in schools and absenteeism?

Table 20 provides the correlation coefficients between the three subtypes of school engagement and absenteeism. In context, the significant correlations suggested

that as a student's perceived engagement goes up, the number of classes he/she misses goes down. Still, although these coefficients were significant at the $p < .05$ level, they were weak correlations.

Table 20.
Pearson Correlation for Intensity of Victimization & Absenteeism (n=860). (Fall)

	Absenteeism	Behavioral	Cognitive	Emotional
Absenteeism	--	-.098*	-.077*	-.062*
Behavioral		--	.516**	.470**
Cognitive			--	.748**
Emotional				--
M	36.71	22.16	18.09	18.24
SD	32.63	2.46	3.86	4.12

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 21 provides the spring survey data correlations between engagement subtypes and absenteeism. Comparing the fall data correlations to the spring data correlations, all three relationships between the independent variables (school engagement) and the dependent variable (absenteeism) again had statistically significant negative correlations. However, a difference in the spring correlation coefficients was that they were significant at the $p < .01$ level, and each correlation increased somewhat from the fall data, though still low in value. This may be attributed to a simultaneous trend of an increase in missed school and a decreased engagement rate seen across the two survey administrations.

Table 21.
Pearson Correlation for Intensity of Victimization & Absenteeism (n=860). (Spring)

	Absenteeism	Behavioral	Cognitive	Emotional
Absenteeism	--	-.150**	-.103**	-.090**
Behavioral		--	.596**	.543**
Cognitive			--	.774**
Emotional				--

M	53.09	21.39	17.07	17.16
SD	44.19	2.78	4.12	4.44

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The significance of the correlation coefficients between the engagement subtypes and absenteeism suggested the same relationship proposed by Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) in which engagement perhaps influences attendance directly, and peer victimization variables could possibly affect the levels of engagement for the students. All three types of engagement (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional) had statistically significant negative correlations $p < .05$ with absenteeism indicating that as student engagement levels went up, the number of classes they missed went down.

Research Question #7

What are the relationships between frequencies of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization and the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement?

All of the engagement subtypes were statistically significantly correlated with the victimization variables at the $p < .05$ level. All of the correlations were negative, indicating, in context, that as victimization levels went up, engagement levels went down. Many of the correlation coefficients were significant at the $p < .01$ level. The strongest of the correlation coefficients was between the exclusion victim variable and behavioral engagement $r = -.226$. All other correlations significant at the $p < .01$ level ranged between $-.112$ and $-.178$. The weakest correlations were between victimization intensity and the behavioral and cognitive engagement variables ($r = -.072$ and $r = -.084$ respectively). Table 22 lists the correlation coefficients between each of the engagement subtypes and all of the victimization frequency and intensity variables.

Table 22.

*Pearson Correlations for Intensity of Victimization & Engagement (n=860).
(Fall)*

	Behavior	Cognitive	Emotional	Verbal Victim	Exclusion Victim	Physical Victim	Victim Intensity
Behavior	--	.516**	.470**	-.118**	-.226**	-.112**	-.151**
Cognitive		--	.774**	-.130**	-.178**	-.148**	-.072*
Emotion			--	-.126**	-.132**	-.127**	-.084*
Verbal				--	.626**	.471**	.496**
Exclusion					--	.431**	.489**
Physical						--	.246**
Intensity							--
<i>M</i>	22.16	18.09	18.24	2.29	1.66	.54	1.87
<i>SD</i>	2.46	3.86	4.12	2.89	2.38	.94	2.51

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The correlation coefficients for all of the bivariate relationships were slightly lower in the spring administration of the survey (Table 23). This was mostly likely due to the fact that the engagement variables on average indicated a greater decrease over time than the increase in the victimization variables over the same time. Still, two of the coefficients were statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level, seven were significant at the $p < .01$ level, and three of the relationships no longer showed statistically significant relationships; cognitive engagement no longer was significantly correlated with physical victim frequency or the victimization intensity variable.

The strongest of the relationships was between the verbal victimization variable and the emotional engagement variable $r = -.141$. This observation coincided with the fact that the emotional engagement variable decreased the most over time, while the verbal victim variable increased the most of the victimization variables in that same time period. It appeared, generally speaking, that the strongest relationships overall were between the verbal victimization variable and the differing engagement subtypes.

Table 23 lists the specific correlation coefficients between the victimization and engagement variables. Significant negative correlations between many of the victimization and engagement variables indicated that as victimization levels go up, school engagement levels go down. Although statistically different from zero, many of these correlations were still quite low, indicating weak relationships; these correlations reflected the scatterplots of all of the pairs of variables, in which no discernible linear pattern was readily apparent.

Table 23.
*Pearson Correlations for Intensity of Victimization & Engagement (n=860).
(Spring)*

	Behavior	Cognitive	Emotional	Verbal Victim	Exclusion Victim	Physical Victim	Victim Intensity
Behavior	--	.596**	.543**	-.125**	-.104**	-.047**	-.087*
Cognitive		--	.774**	-.101**	-.054	-.066	-.008
Emotional			--	-.141**	-.124**	-.093**	-.085*
Verbal				--	.692**	.593**	.558**
Exclusion					--	.501**	.584**
Physical						--	.463**
Intensity							--
<i>M</i>	21.39	17.07	17.16	2.94	2.00	.60	2.32
<i>SD</i>	2.78	4.12	4.44	3.28	2.49	.99	2.95

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Significant to the overall research question for this study was the fact that overall the victimization variables were significantly, albeit weakly, correlated with the engagement variables. The significant negative correlations between these series of variables indicated that as students were victimized at higher levels, their school engagement went down. This served as evidence that perhaps the effects of victimization on attendance were mediated by engagement, and certainly as students were victimized more, in general, their engagement while at school tended to decline.

Research Question #8

Does the frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity for affected youths predict their subsequent absenteeism?

Multiple regression procedures were used to determine whether frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity were predictive of absenteeism for the students. The predictors included all victimization type frequency totals as well as the victimization intensity total; the independent variable was entered as total absences for each student.

Before multiple regression analyses can be performed on a set of data, several assumptions about the data must be met to ensure reliability and validity of the results. First, a sufficient sample size is needed for the analyses. For multiple regressions, it is generally expected to have at least 15 cases per predictor variable (Pallant, 2005). This requirement was exceeded for this particular study.

In addition, an assumption for multiple regression analysis is normality of the data. Absenteeism data were highly positively skewed, and they were log transformed for the purposes of these analyses. Multiple regression as a model for predicting a dependent variable demands data with acceptable levels of skewness and kurtosis to ensure normality of the data; this ensures no systematic pattern to the error for the predicted values of the dependent variable. The absenteeism variable, computed as a total of students' absences, had unacceptable skewness and kurtosis because so many of the students had no or very few absences. Figure 3 demonstrates the skewness of the dependent variable. Prior to the log transformation of the absenteeism variable, the kurtosis statistic was 5.015 and the skewness statistic measured 1.81.

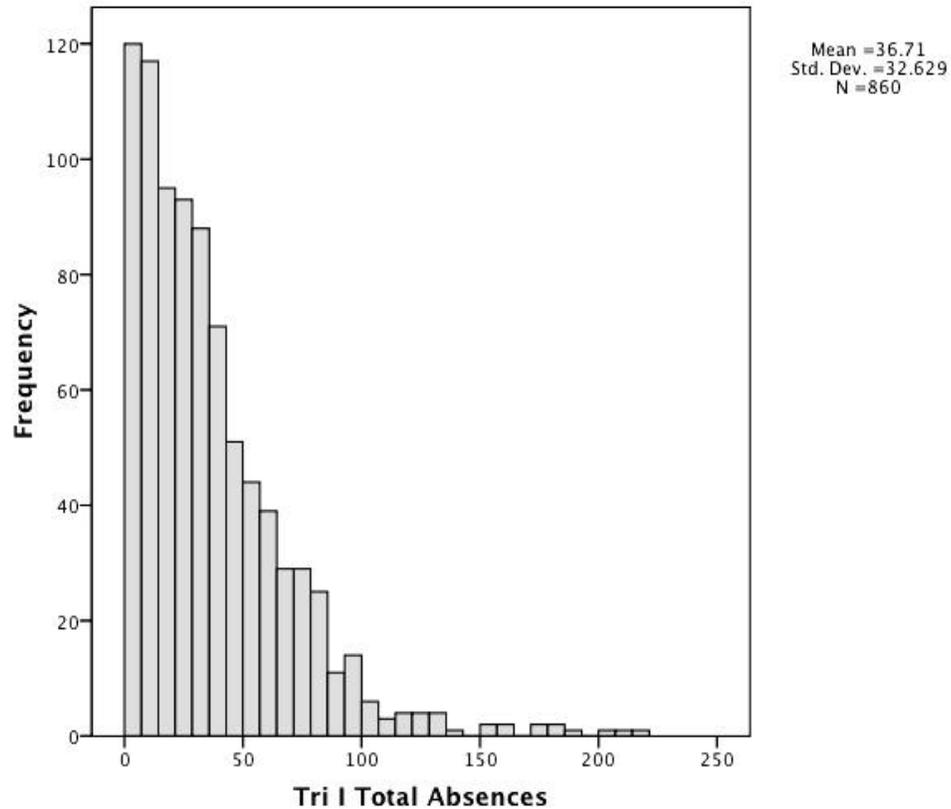


Figure 3. Skewed distribution of absenteeism variable prior to transformation.

To transform the data to get acceptable skewness and kurtosis, a simple log₁₀ transformation was applied. After log transformation of the absenteeism variable, the skewness and kurtosis statistics became much more appropriate for multiple regression at -.071 and -.505 respectively. These values indicated the log transformation had corrected the non-normality of the data to acceptable values of less than 3 (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

Figure 4 shows the effect of the log transformation on the distribution of the absenteeism variable.

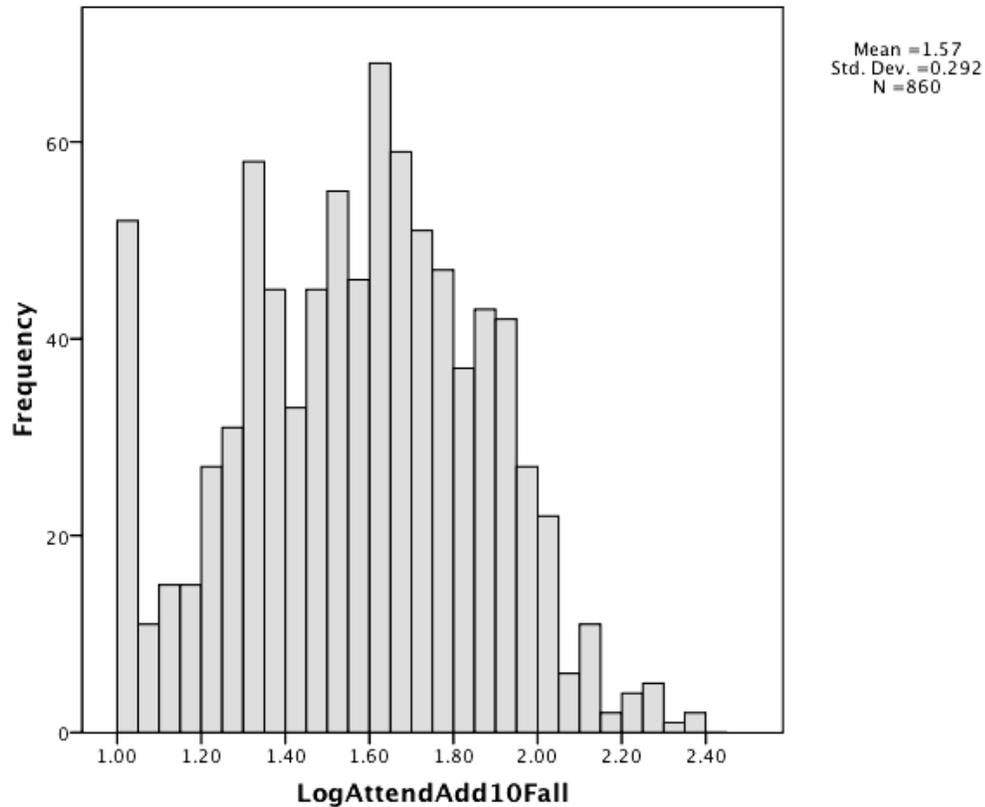


Figure 4. Distribution of absenteeism variable after log transformation.

When a log transformation is applied to data to rectify such situations, the interpretation of the model changes slightly. Whereas typically a regression coefficient for a dependent variable can be interpreted as the expected change in the dependent variable for a one unit change in the independent variable (holding all other variables constant), with log transformed data, the coefficient becomes the change in the log of the dependent variable for a one unit change in the independent variable holding all other variables constant. In addition, because of a skewed distribution, the victimization intensity variable was log transformed. After transformation, the intensity variable had sufficient skewness and kurtosis for regression analysis as well.

The peer victimization frequencies by type were not significant in the prediction

of attendance. The overall quality of the regression ($R^2=.005$, $p>.05$) indicated that only .5% of the variability in attendance was explained by the frequency and intensity of victimization variables. Table 24 documents the results of the regression equation.

Table 24.

Victimization as Independent Variables Regression Equation Results.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
.074	.005	.001	.292

In an attempt to determine if any of the independent variables were predictive of attendance, the independent variables were removed one at a time. No significant gain in the coefficient of determination statistic resulted in this procedure, and at no point were any of the independent variables significant in prediction at the $p<.05$ level. Table 25 provides the coefficients for each of the predictor variables and the corresponding statistical nonsignificance of all four predictor coefficients.

Table 25.

Coefficients for Regression Equation for Dependent Variable of Absenteeism and Victimization Constructs as Independent Variables.

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.561	.014		114.752	$\leq.001$
Victimization - Intensity	.001	.005	.011	.276	.783
Victimization - Verbal	.007	.005	.070	1.491	.136
Victimization - Physical	-.014	.012	-.046	-1.180	.238
Victimization - Exclusion	.001	.006	.070	.222	.825

Even though the analysis did not have significant results, as is standard with regression analyses, the residuals were analyzed for normal distribution and for lack of homoscedasticity. Random residual patterns ensure the equation is not making systematic error in prediction of the dependent variable. A normal probability plot of the standardized residuals indicated normally distributed residual error, and a plot of the

dependent variable on the x-axis, and standardized residuals on the y-axis revealed no pattern; this suggested lack of homoscedasticity for the model.

Similar to the fall data, the spring regression model showed no significant predictive abilities of the victimization variables on absenteeism. An $R^2=.003$, $p>.05$, echoed the results of the multiple regression analysis using the fall data.

In summary, the victimization frequency variables broken into three subtypes of victimization, as well as the victimization intensity variable, had no predictive value for attendance rates. In short, students were not missing more school because of increased victimization. The regression equation demonstrated no significant predictive relationship between the independent variables of frequency and intensity of victimization and the dependent variable of student absenteeism. The R^2 of the equation was nonsignificant and none of the independent variables had regression coefficients significantly different from zero.

Research Question #9

Do the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement behaviors predict subsequent absenteeism?

No statistically significant predictive relationship between the independent variables of school engagement type and the dependent variable of student absenteeism was found; the R^2 of the equation was nonsignificant. However, the regression weight for the independent variable, behavioral engagement, was statistically significantly different from zero. The other two variables (cognitive and emotional engagement) were nonsignificant at the $p<.05$ level. An R^2 of .016 indicates that the engagement variables explained 1.6% of the variability in absenteeism, which was not enough to suggest a

strong relationship between the variables. Table 26 describes the strength of the multiple regression analysis and Table 27 displays the coefficients for the different engagement subtypes.

Table 26.

Engagement as Independent Variables Regression Equation Results.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
.127	.016	.013	.291

Table 27.

Coefficients for Regression Equation for Dependent Variable of Absenteeism and Engagement Constructs as Independent Variables.

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.903	.090		21.205	≤.001
Engagement - Behavior	-.014	.005	-.115	-2.879	.004
Engagement - Emotional	.001	.004	.012	.236	.813
Engagement - Cognitive	-.002	.004	-.031	-.574	.566

One would interpret the statistically significant behavioral engagement coefficient as the following: for a one-unit change in the engagement behavior total, a .014 decrease in the log10 of the absenteeism variable is expected. Even though the p-value of the coefficient indicated statistical significance, the interpretation of the coefficient was not warranted with such a small R² value for the model. Lack of homoscedasticity and normal distribution of error terms was checked again with the appropriate graphs indicating no systematic error patterns.

In summary, the engagement variables did not appear significant in the prediction of students' absences. This was in direct contrast to the original hypothesis that student engagement is significantly related to attendance. Regression modeling did not indicate that student engagement and attendance were significantly related.

Research Question #10

Does the frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity for affected youths predict total school engagement?

The victimization variables did not statistically significantly predict school engagement for students. Two of the victimization variables were significant in the equation at the $p < .05$ level (exclusion victim total and verbal victim total), however a weak R^2 of .045 indicates only 4.5% of the variability in total engagement was explained by the victimization variables. The total engagement variable was sufficiently normal to conduct a multiple regression model. Figure 5 shows the variable distribution.

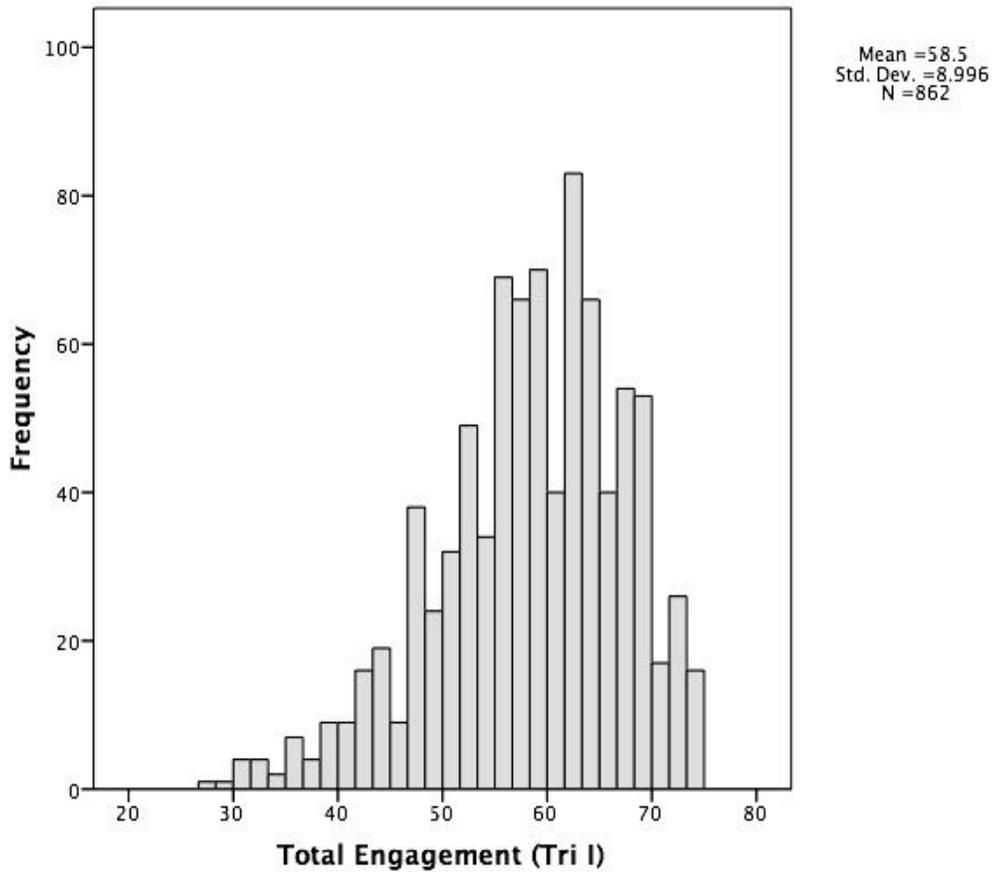


Figure 5. Distribution of total engagement variable.

As with the previous regression models, the R^2 indicated very little of the variability in engagement was explained by victimization. Table 28 displays the results of the regression analysis.

Table 28.

Victimization Variables as Independents Regression Equation Results.

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
.212	.045	.041	8.812

Two of the four predictor variables in the regression equation were significantly different from zero ($p < .05$). Physical victimization and exclusion were predictive of engagement. However, the small R^2 still indicated that the equation overall did not provide a strong model for predicting engagement overall. Contrary to the original hypotheses for this study, victimization and engagement were not strongly associated.

Table 29 displays the coefficients for each victimization variable and their corresponding p-values.

Table 29.

Coefficients for Regression Equation for Dependent Variable of Total Engagement and Four Victimization Constructs as Independent Variables.

	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	60.002	.409		146.848	$\leq .001$
Victimization - Intensity	-.046	.143	-.013	-.322	.747
Victimization - Verbal	-.015	.144	-.005	-.102	.919
Victimization - Physical	-.763	.369	-.080	-2.070	.039
Victimization - Exclusion	-.585	.171	-.155	-3.419	.001

The statistically significant negative coefficient of exclusion in the prediction of total engagement would be interpreted that as victimization goes up, engagement goes down. The other victimization types were not statistically significant in the prediction of student engagement levels.

Research Question #11

Does treatment of the peer victimization and school engagement variables as latent constructs rather than direct measurements serve to provide a measurement model with adequate fit?

Prior to testing the structural equation model, the measurement model for the two latent variables for peer victimization and student engagement needed to be assessed. The latent variable representing overall victimization combined the measurement of four different victimization components. Three different subtypes of victimization (verbal, physical, and exclusion), as well as a victimization intensity measure were included to form the latent variable of peer victimization. Engagement was treated as a latent variable as well, with the three identified components of behavioral, cognitive, and emotional engagement types serving to construct the latent construct used in the model. Figure 6 displays the hypothesized measurement model for the latent constructs of peer victimization and students' school engagement. The measurement model represents measured variables as squares and latent variables as ovals. Latent variables have one fixed parameter to allow for the scaling of each other indicator included as part of the latent construct.

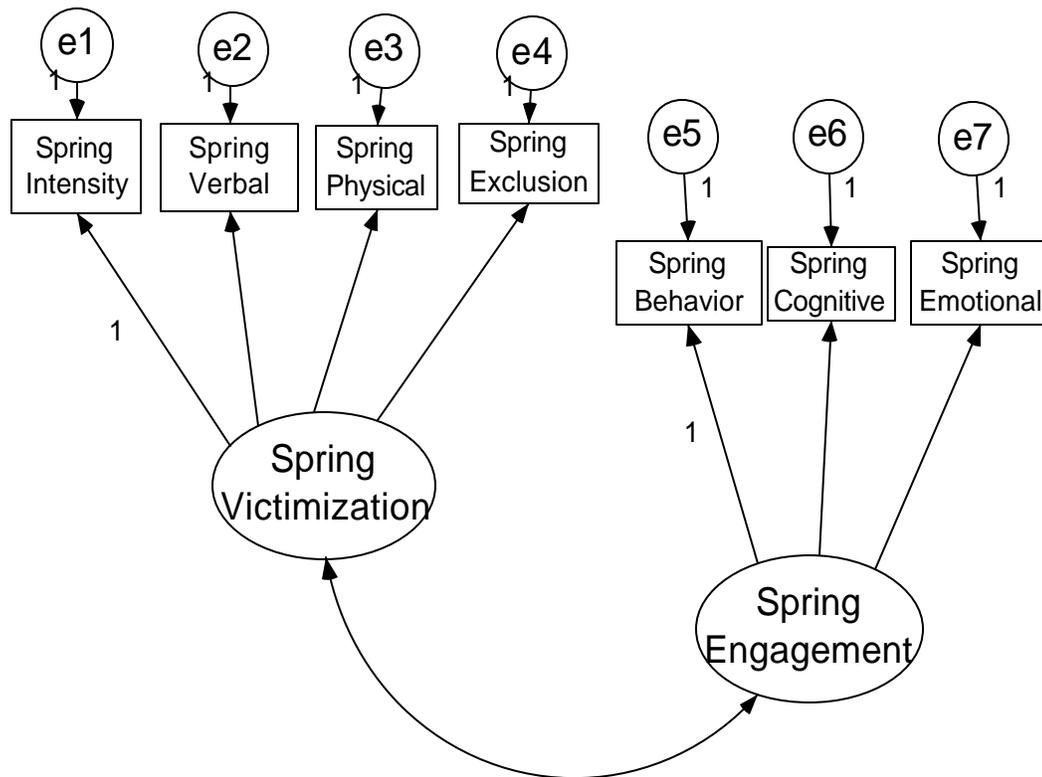


Figure 6. Hypothesized latent constructs for peer victimization and school engagement (spring data).

SEM Assumptions

Prior to model estimation, the data were examined to determine if they met the assumptions necessary for the structural equation modeling. Assumptions for structural equation modeling are the following: normality of distributions, linearity, appropriate sample size, and appropriate treatment of missing data.

Normality

Histograms for each variable provided evidence that all variables except the attendance variable and victimization intensity variable were sufficiently normal. The attendance variable and the peer victimization intensity indicator were log transformed to

achieve acceptable normality prior to model analysis. Both independent and dependent indicators were determined to be normal within skew and kurtosis ranges of +/-1.0, acceptable values for SEM analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989).

Linearity

Upon calculation of the correlation coefficients for all of the bivariate relationships, the scatterplots were produced and studied to determine linearity. Partial plots for all variable pairs indicated linear, albeit weak, relationships between each pair of variables included in the model. No nonlinear relationships seemed to exist between any two of the included variables.

Sample Size

A sample size of 860 was sufficient for model estimation using the acceptable criteria of 10 subjects per estimated parameter (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). The largest hypothesized model for this study included 11 parameters, so according to the established criterion sample size over 110 would be sufficient; however, generally, 200 cases is the lowest acceptable sample size for SEM estimation (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). 860 cases for the estimation of the hypothesized models were sufficient.

Missing Values

As previously described, all students with missing data were removed from the dataset to allow for model estimation. Students with missing data were dropped listwise from the dataset because data imputation for the percent of missing values did not seem reasonable.

Outliers

Data were previously examined for outliers and nonsensical values as part of the data cleaning process. With the removal of cases with data missingness, no measures were deemed outliers in each of the variables. In addition, the AMOS output for each model did not indicate any multivariate outliers with statistically significant Mahalanobis distances for cases included in estimation. Kline (1998) recommends using a conservative cutoff for testing significance of Mahalanobis distance (e.g. $p < .001$), and no cases were significant at that prescribed level.

Table 30 displays the correlation coefficients between all of the fall survey variables used to estimate the measurement and structural models, and Table 31 displays the correlation coefficients between the spring survey variables.

Table 30.

Correlation Coefficients between variables used in structural equation models (Fall data).

	Behavior	Cognitive	Emotional	Verbal Victim	Exclusion Victim	Physical Victim	Victim Intensity	Attendance (Logged)	GPA
Behavior	--	.516**	.470**	-.118**	-.226**	-.112**	-.151**	-.098**	.372**
Cognitive		--	.774**	-.130**	-.178**	-.148**	-.072*	-.077*	.219**
Emotional			--	-.126**	-.132**	-.127**	-.084*	-.062**	.149**
Verbal				--	.626**	.471**	.496**	.048	-.121**
Exclusion					--	.431**	.489**	.036	-.180**
Physical						--	.246**	.003	-.050
Intensity							--	.029	-.095**
Attendance								--	-.329**
GPA									--
<i>M</i>	22.16	18.09	18.24	2.29	1.66	.54	1.87	1.57	3.18
<i>SD</i>	2.46	3.86	4.12	2.89	2.38	.94	2.51	.292	.642

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 31.

Correlation Coefficients between variables used in structural equation models (Spring data).

	Behavior	Cognitive	Emotional	Verbal Victim	Exclusion Victim	Physical Victim	Victim Intensity	Attendance (Logged)	GPA
Behavior	--	.596**	.543**	-.125**	-.104**	-.047**	-.087*	.485**	-.150**
Cognitive		--	.774**	-.101**	-.054	-.066	-.008	.340**	-.103**
Emotional			--	-.141**	-.124**	-.093**	-.085*	.278**	-.090**
Verbal Exclusion				--	.692**	.593**	.558**	-.126**	.044
Physical Intensity					--	.501**	.584**	-.149**	.041
Attendance							--	.463**	-.104**
GPA								-.114**	.036
								--	-.364**
<i>M</i>	21.39	17.07	17.16	2.94	2.00	.60	2.32	1.70	3.15
<i>SD</i>	2.78	4.12	4.44	3.28	2.49	.99	2.95	.301	.647

*Correlation significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**Correlation significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The original hypothesized measurement model was tested using AMOS software. The estimation method for the model was maximum likelihood. Model fit was examined using the chi-square statistic, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), root mean square residuals (RMR), and comparative fit index (CFI). Kline recommends reporting at least four tests to assess model fit (1998). These four fit indices were chosen as they are seemingly the most frequently used in other studies using SEM.

Model chi-square is the most common fit test for structural equation models. The chi-square value is not significant if there is good model fit. Generally, if model chi-square significance is $<.05$, the model should be rejected. A chi-square goodness of fit index, $\chi^2(13, N=860) = 48.166, p<.001$, statistically significant at the $.05$ level, indicated a poor fitting model. However, with a large sample size (chi-square has a great deal of power), chi-square should be interpreted cautiously; often, other measures of fit are used in conjunction with chi-square to determine overall model fit (Kelloway, 1998). In large samples, virtually all models will result in poor fit according to the chi-square goodness of fit index.

In addition to chi-square, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was evaluated for the model. Generally, a RMSEA statistic of less than or equal to $.05$ indicates good fit (Kelloway, 1998), and values less than or equal to $.08$ indicate adequate fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). An RMSEA of $.056$ indicated good fit for this latent structure measurement model.

Another measure of fit, root mean square residuals (RMR as reported by AMOS) measures the absolute value of the covariance residuals, and the closer the RMR to 0.0 , the better the fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). Values of less than $.08$ are desired. The

standardized root mean square residuals, (RMR=.0265) was a third fit index indicating good fit for the measurement model.

The comparative fit index (CFI) compares the structural model with a null model that assumes the latent variables are uncorrelated. CFI is a measure relatively unaffected by sample size (Kline, 1998), making it a proper choice for this particular study.

Comparative fit index statistics of greater than .90 (Kelloway, 1998) or greater than .95 to indicate good fit (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). The comparative fit index statistic for this model was .986 indicating good fit by conventional standards (CFI>.95).

In summary, the fit indices for the proposed measurement model indicated good fit overall. Interpretation of the path coefficients was warranted. The fit indices for the measurement model are listed in Table 32. No post hoc modifications were performed as all included path coefficients were statistically significant ($p < .05$), and other modifications were substantively unreasonable. The final model, including significant standardized coefficients is illustrated in Figure 7. The strong standardized path coefficients between the latent variables and their corresponding indicator variables suggested sound latent structure for the two included variables.

Table 32.
Fit Indices for Hypothesized Measurement Model (n=860).

<i>Fit Index</i>	<i>Spring Data Model</i>
C^2	48.166
<i>df</i>	13
<i>CFI</i>	.986
<i>RMR</i>	.0265
<i>RMSEA</i>	.056 [.040, .073]

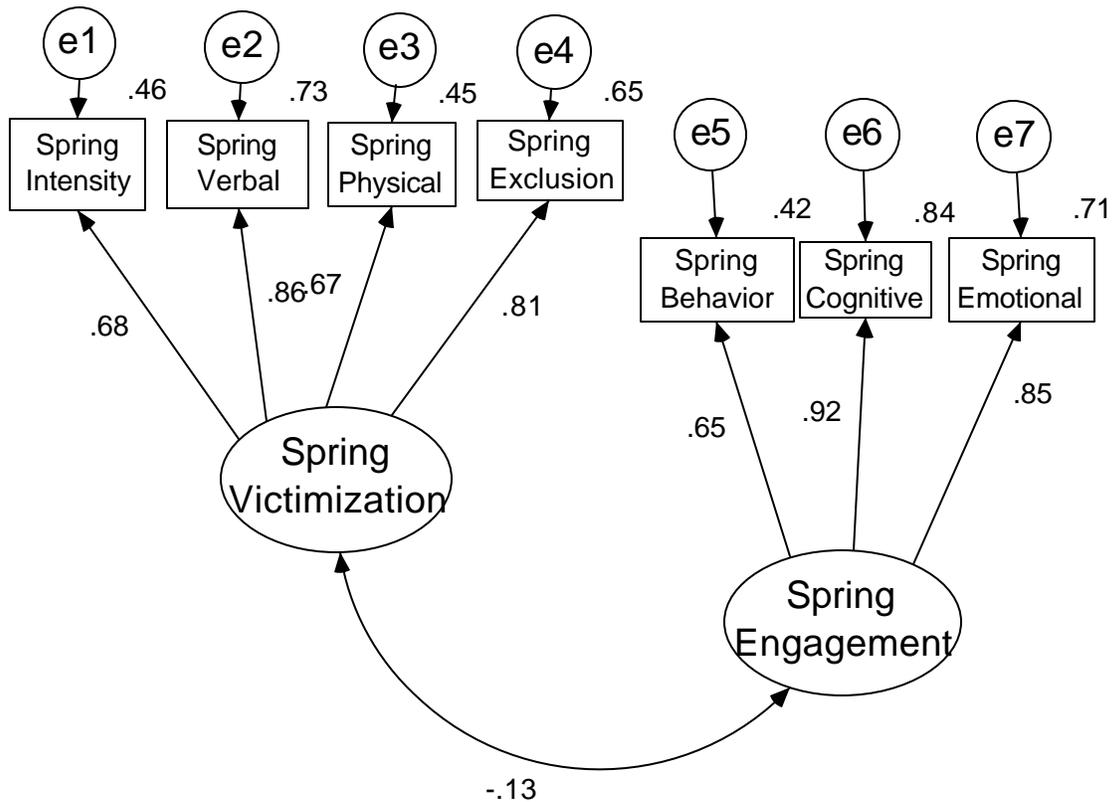


Figure 7. Hypothesized measurement model including standardized coefficients (*spring data*).

The path coefficients for the fall data version of the measurement model were all statistically significant at the $p < .05$ level. All path coefficients between latent variables and the indicator variables ranged between .67 and .92 indicating sound latent structure and verifying that each indicator variable contributed significantly to the overall latent construct. A negative standardized path coefficient (-.13) between victimization and engagement suggests that as a student faced more victimization his/her engagement declined. The standardized path coefficients and their corresponding p-values are displayed in table 33.

Table 33.

Hypothesized latent constructs for peer victimization and school engagement (spring data).

Independent	Dependent	Standardized Estimate	P
Victimization	Intensity	.679	
Victimization	Verbal	.855	≤.001
Victimization	Physical	.672	≤.001
Victimization	Exclusion	.805	≤.001
Victimization	Engagement (Correlation)	-.128	
Engagement	Behavioral	.648	
Engagement	Cognitive	.915	≤.001
Engagement	Emotional	.846	≤.001

The robustness of the measurement model and the corresponding statistically significant path coefficients between all included variables confirmed that a latent construct treatment of the peer victimization and student engagement variables was appropriate.

Research Question #12

Does treatment of peer victimization, student engagement, attendance, and achievement variables different from the study by Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) serve to provide a measurement model with adequate fit?

The proposed structural equation model for this study is displayed previously in Figure 2. The model included a latent construct representation of peer victimization and student engagement, as the fit for the previous measurement models appeared adequate to treat both of these variables as latent constructs. In addition, the attendance and intensity variables were transformed via the same log procedure as in the regression equation component of the study to provide adequate normality for structural equation modeling. The achievement measure was included as student grade point average. Using AMOS, the relationships were examined between peer victimization, a latent variable with four indicators (verbal, physical, exclusion, and intensity), school engagement, a latent variable with three indicators (behavioral, cognitive, and emotional), attendance, and

achievement.

Fit indices for this model indicated adequate fit. The same fit indices used to evaluate the previous model were employed for this model. A chi-square goodness of fit index, $\chi^2(23, N=860) = 163.474, p=.001$, was significant at the .05 level, indicating a poor fitting model. Again, chi-square goodness of fit should be interpreted cautiously with large samples such as that found in this study.

An RMSEA of (0.084) for this model indicated potentially adequate fit using standard criterion (RMSEA<.08). The confidence interval for RMSEA included values less than .08 [.072, .097], indicating that fit for the model could be considered adequate. For the tested model, a RMR of .0430 echoed the original evaluation of RMSEA – the model fit was adequate. The comparative fit index statistic for this model was .952 indicating good fit by conventional standards (CFI>.95).

In sum, the fit indices for the hypothesized structural model were somewhat contradictory, but overall, the fit of the model was adequate. An unfortunate aspect of structural equation modeling is the lack of universally accepted criteria for determining model fit. It is up to the researcher to judge the fit statistics and make an appropriate determination. In this case, it seemed reasonable to examine the paths of the model, but still the model interpretation should be done cautiously. Of all the paths, the only nonsignificant relationship at $p<.01$ was between the latent variable of “Spring Victimization” and “Attendance.” The standardized path coefficients for the hypothesized model are shown in Figure 8.

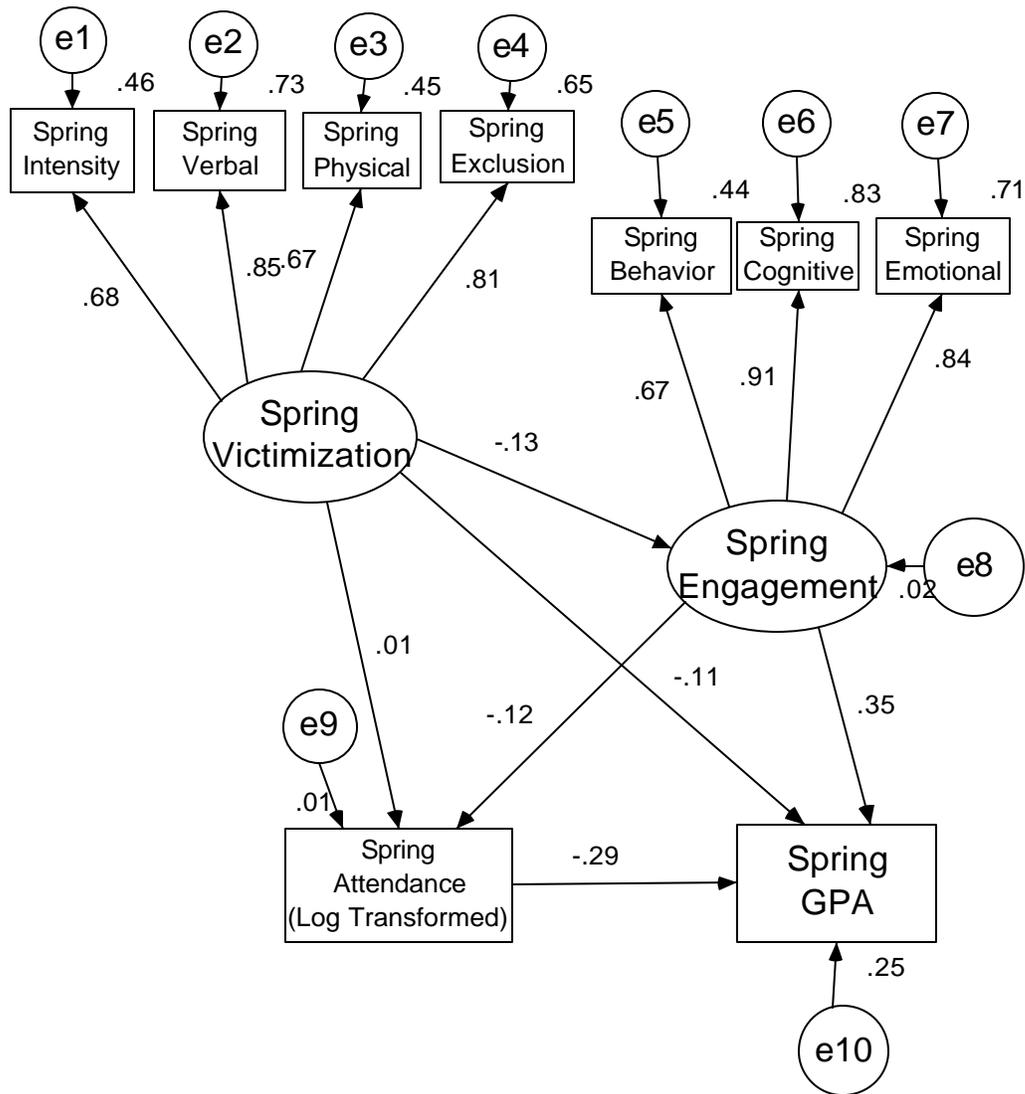


Figure 8. Standardized path coefficients for hypothesized model treating victimization and engagement as multi-dimensional latent constructs, and treating school avoidance as actual school attendance.

For the unadjusted hypothesized model, the standardized regression weights for each included path and their corresponding statistical significance are described in Table 34.

Table 34.

Standardized Path Coefficients and Associated P-values: Hypothesized Structural Model.

Independent	Dependent	Standardized Estimate	P
Victimization	Engagement	-.130	≤.001
Engagement	Attendance	-.118	≤.001
Victimization	Attendance	.014	.713
Victimization	Intensity	.680	
Victimization	Verbal	.853	≤.001
Victimization	Physical	.672	≤.001
Victimization	Exclusion	.807	≤.001
Engagement	Behavior	.665	
Engagement	Cognitive	.911	≤.001
Engagement	Emotional	.841	≤.001
Engagement	Achievement	.347	≤.001
Attendance	Achievement	-.287	≤.001
Victimization	Achievement	-.109	≤.001

Standardized path coefficients allow comparison of the strengths of the relationships. Higher levels of victimization indicated lower engagement, and lower levels of engagement indicated lower attendance rates. The strongest relationship was between engagement and achievement; logically, more engaged students do better in school. Statistically significant negative coefficients between attendance and achievement as well as victimization and achievement suggested that as the number of missed classes went up, achievement went down, and as victimization levels went up, achievement went down as well. As was suggested by preliminary analyses (correlation coefficients and regression equations), victimization was not statistically significantly related to attendance. All of the latent variable components had strong path coefficients repeating the indication of sound latent structure from the first analysis.

The statistically significant paths of interest were between victimization and engagement (standardized coefficient = -.130), engagement and attendance (standardized coefficient = -.118), engagement and achievement (standardized coefficient = .347),

victimization and achievement (standardized coefficient = $-.109$), and attendance and achievement (standardized coefficient = $-.287$).

Model modification indices suggested by the AMOS analysis were not reasonable adjustments to the model. Correlating errors between latent variable indicators were the only indicated changes, and substantively, these paths did not seem reasonable. So another model (Figure 9) was analyzed after deleting the single path in the model that had a nonsignificant coefficient.

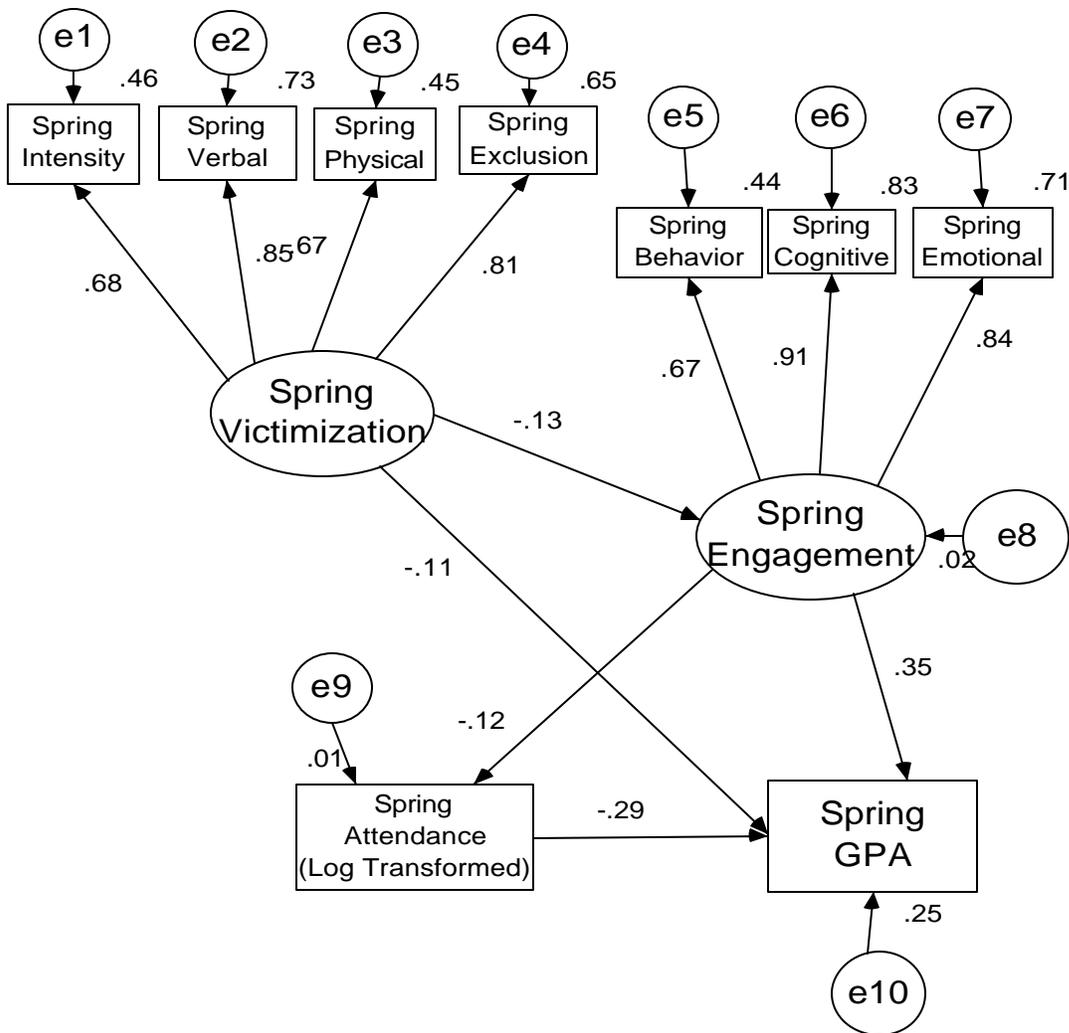


Figure 9. Adjusted measurement model with standardized path coefficients.

The same fit indices used to evaluate the *a priori* model did not indicate substantial improvement for the *post hoc* model or change in the significance of the standardized path coefficients. A chi-square goodness of fit index, $\chi^2(17, N=860) = 163.609$, $p \leq .001$, significant at the .05 level, still indicated a poor fitting model. And, similar to the *a priori* model an RMSEA of .082 and an RMR of .0431 indicated adequate fit. The only fit index suggesting overall good fit was a CFI of .952 using standard criteria.

Additionally, when comparing nested models, the parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) is used to determine the better fitting of the two models (Tabachnick & Fidell, 1989). When comparing two nested models, the model with the higher PNFI is better. The PNFI of the *a priori* model was .604 compared to the *post hoc* model (PNFI = .630) indicating potentially better fit for the adjusted model. Generally, a PNFI $>.50$ indicates good fit, so both models fit well according to the PNFI index criterion. Ultimately, the fit indices for the adjusted model were contradictory, and no substantial improvement was found when the changes were made to the model. Table 35 displays the fit indices of the two structural models.

Table 35.
Fit Indices for Structural Model 1 and Adjusted Structural Model 1 (n=860).

<i>Fit Index</i>	<i>Hypothesized Model</i>	<i>Adjusted Model</i>
C^2	163.474	163.609
<i>df</i>	23	24
<i>CFI</i>	.952	.952
<i>RMR</i>	.227	.226
<i>RMSEA</i>	.084 [.072, .097]	.082 [.071, .094]
<i>PNFI</i>	.604	.630

Both of the models had similar fit, and both had adequate fit overall using conventional fit indices criteria. The path coefficient of interest (that between victimization and attendance) was not statistically different from 0.0. Additionally, other path coefficients were statistically significant but still relatively weak, as in the case of paths between engagement and attendance, victimization and engagement, and victimization and achievement. Neither model contradicted the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald model, nor did either provide sufficient evidence of a better understanding of the peer victimization and student attendance link. The model was robust, but the path coefficients indicated that the hypothesized relationships between peer victimization and attendance were not as strong as originally believed. Again, the relatively low standardized coefficients indicated that although the model had good fit, the relationships between the variables of interest were not strong.

Research Question #13

Does a structural equation model controlling for the fall survey data by using multiple group analysis, with the same latent treatment of the peer victimization and school engagement variables, demonstrate good model fit?

Structural equation modeling can handle repeated measures data. For the first two structural equation models evaluated in this study, the data were treated as a single measure. It seemed reasonable to treat the victimization measures as variables affected by the experiences of the students up to that point in time. However, by giving the survey to the students twice, the data can be treated as repeated measures. A multiple group analysis model suggested by Kline (1998) includes each pair of time-1 and time-2 measures in the specified variables, which in essence, models the repeated measures nature of the data. The assumption driving this model specification is that by including

both the time-1 and time-2 measures as part of the variables in the model, we were in effect, controlling for the fall data.

Figure 10 displays the repeated measures version of the structural model. Each variable had the same direct paths included from the previously defined model; however, in AMOS, a multiple group analysis was employed. By using a grouping variable, that defined a measure as either fall or spring for each student, the fall measure and its spring counterpart were both included in the model. AMOS evaluated coefficients for each grouping variable, and the fit indices described overall model fit. For this model the victimization variable was included as a latent construct as the previous results suggested the victimization construct was statistically sound. The same paths between the variables from the previous model were included in this model. In other words, direct paths between victimization and engagement, attendance, and achievement were included, as well as paths between engagement and attendance, attendance and achievement, and engagement and achievement. By starting with all possible relevant paths in the *a priori* model, we adjusted the model according to the analysis results to include only statistically significant paths with a second *post hoc* model.

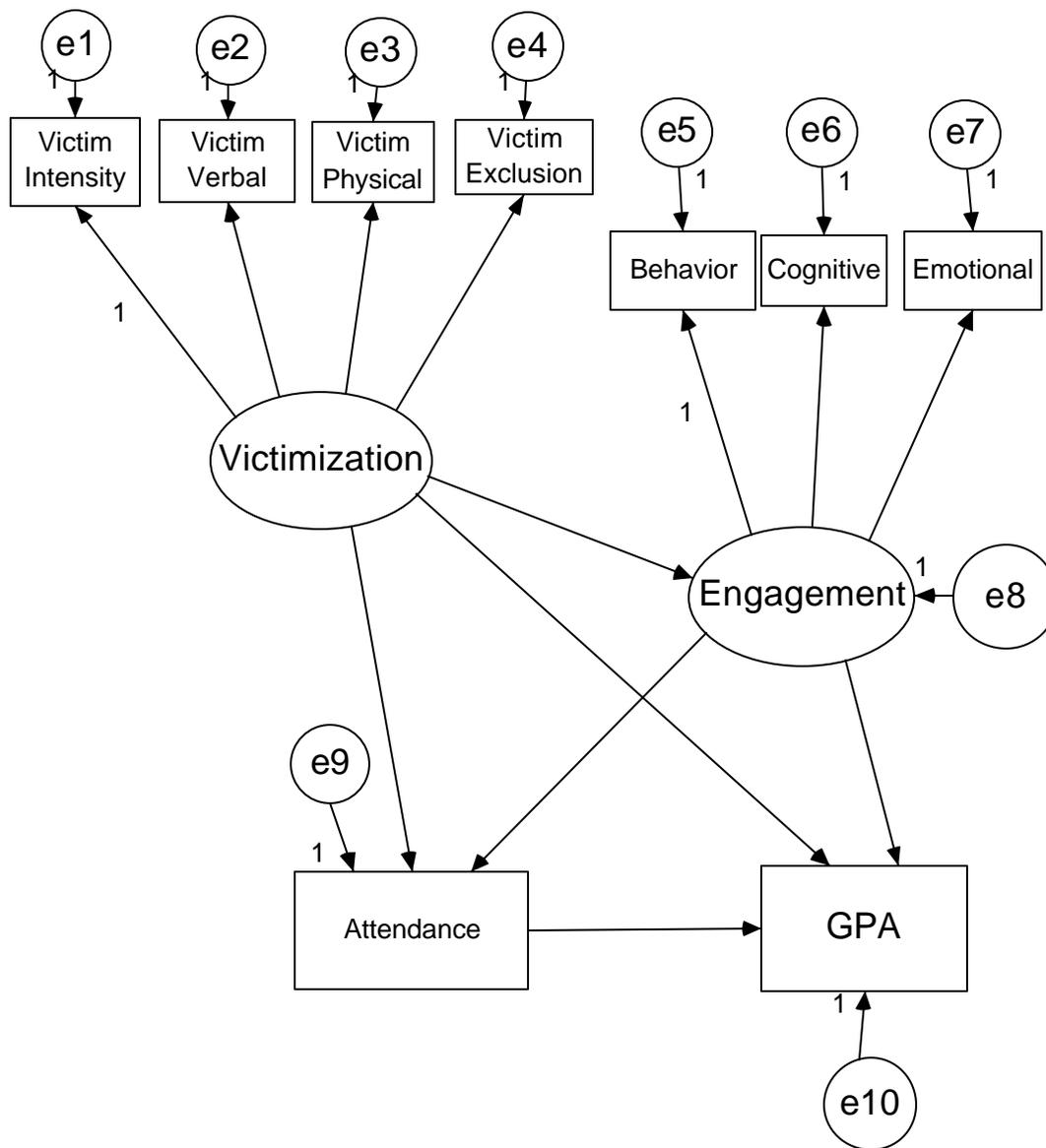


Figure 10. Hypothesized model controlling for fall survey data.

Results for the hypothesized longitudinal model indicated good fit overall. The same fit indices used to evaluate the previous models were employed for this model. A chi-square goodness of fit index, $\chi^2(46, N=860) = 306.645, p \leq .001$, statistically significant at the .05 level, indicated a poor fitting model. However, an RMSEA of .057

(using a cutoff criteria of $<.08$) indicted good fit. The root mean square residuals, (RMR=.0303), also indicated relatively good fit. Lastly, a CFI of .950 (using a criteria of $=.95$) indicated good fit for the model. Overall, the fit indices indicated good fit; all fit indices other than chi-square indicated good fit when compared to the generally accepted cut-off criteria.

AMOS provided the fit indices for the overall hypothesized model; however, in multiple group analysis different path coefficients for the fall and spring measures of the data are provided. This allowed comparison of the path coefficients between fall and spring. Not all standardized path coefficients between endogenous and exogenous variables were statistically significant at the $p<.05$ level. Table 36 lists the corresponding coefficients between each pair of significant variables for the fall group.

Table 36.
Standardized Path Coefficients and Associated P-values: Fall Grouping.

Independent	Dependent	Standardized Estimate	P
Victimization	Engagement	-.216	$\leq.001$
Engagement	Attendance	-.087	$\leq.001$
Victimization	Attendance	.039	.319
Victimization	Intensity	.590	
Victimization	Verbal	.810	$\leq.001$
Victimization	Physical	.536	$\leq.001$
Victimization	Exclusion	.782	$\leq.001$
Engagement	Behavior	.581	
Engagement	Cognitive	.903	$\leq.001$
Engagement	Emotional	.823	$\leq.001$
Engagement	Achievement	.199	$\leq.001$
Attendance	Achievement	-.309	$\leq.001$
Victimization	Achievement	-.114	.002

All path coefficients, except that between victimization and attendance, were statistically significant ($p<.05$). The other paths of interest, those between victimization and achievement, victimization and engagement, as well as victimization and attendance

were all statistically significant ($p < .05$). As was demonstrated in other sections of this study, the relationships between victimization and attendance, as well as those between victimization and achievement although statistically significant, were simply not very strong. Figure 11 displays the standardized path coefficients for the fall grouping in the longitudinal model.

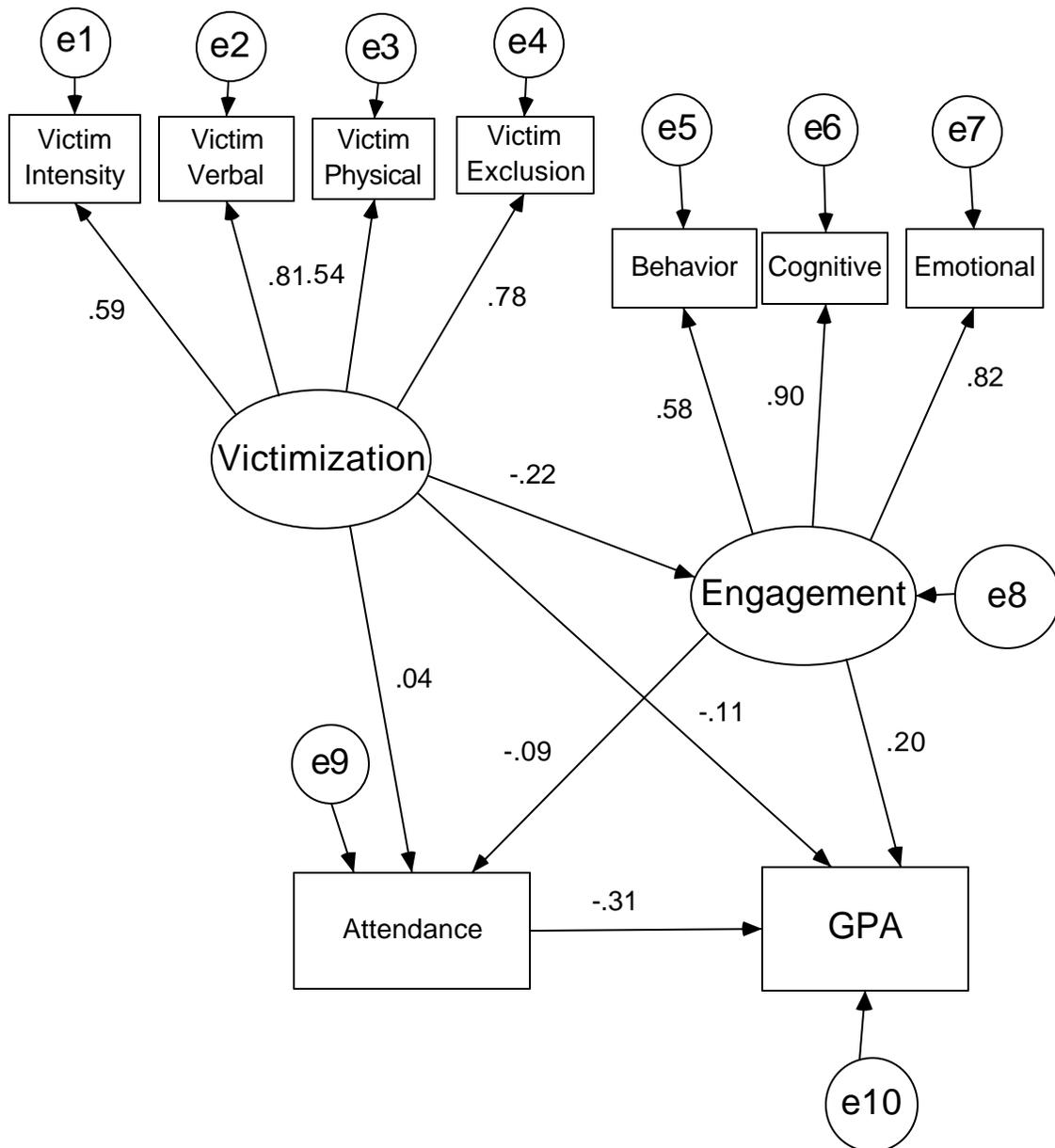


Figure 11. Hypothesized measurement model with standardized path coefficients (Fall group).

The statistically significant coefficient between engagement and achievement suggested that as a student's engagement level went up, so did his/her grade point average. The significant coefficient between attendance and achievement was negative, indicating that as a student's number of missed classes went up, his/her grade point average went down. Similarly, as a student's total peer victimization went up, his/her achievement went down. Although several of the standardized coefficients were statistically different from 0.0, their relatively low standardized values indicated that the relationships were not very strong.

A multiple group analysis provided standardized coefficients for both the fall and spring grouping variables. Table 37 displays the standardized coefficients for the spring grouping, and Figure 12 displays the structural model diagram.

Table 37.
Standardized Path Coefficients and Associated P-values: Spring Grouping.

Independent	Dependent	Standardized Estimate	P
Victimization	Engagement	-.130	.001
Engagement	Attendance	-.129	≤.001
Victimization	Attendance	.026	.479
Victimization	Intensity	.680	
Victimization	Verbal	.853	≤.001
Victimization	Physical	.672	≤.001
Victimization	Exclusion	.807	≤.001
Engagement	Behavior	.665	
Engagement	Cognitive	.911	≤.001
Engagement	Emotional	.841	≤.001
Engagement	Achievement	.341	≤.001
Attendance	Achievement	-.310	≤.001
Victimization	Achievement	-.105	.001

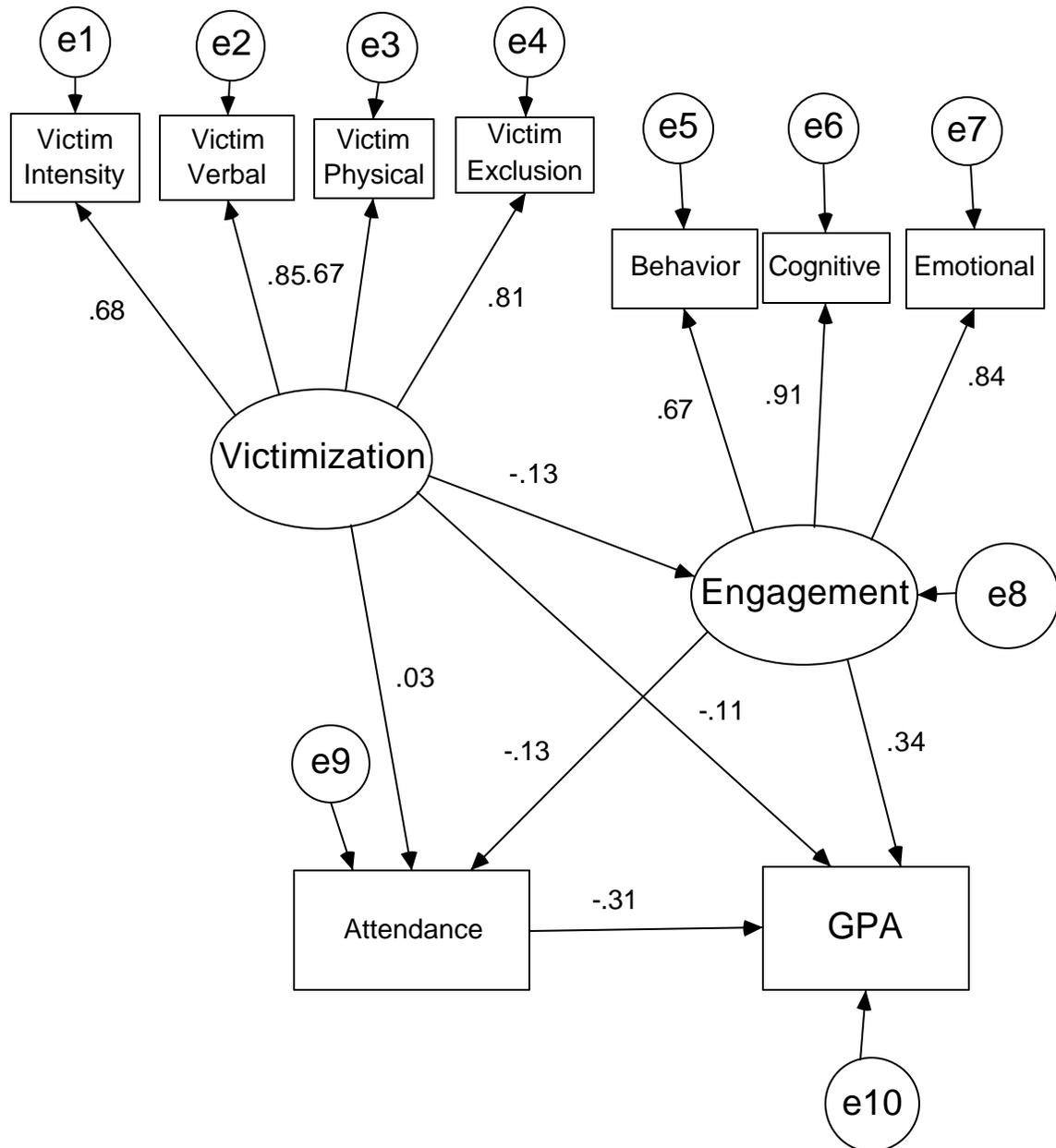


Figure 12. Hypothesized measurement model with standardized path coefficients (Spring group).

The modification indices provided by the AMOS analysis indicated that many paths could be added to increase the fit of the model; however, none of the suggested paths made substantive sense. One should not make decisions about model modification based on the suggested modification indices alone; we should make adjustments that

make substantive sense in relation to the variables. In this case, the suggested paths did not seem reasonable. Removal of the statistically nonsignificant path between victimization and attendance was included as part of the modification of the overall model.

The adjusted model's fit indices indicated slightly better fit than the original *a priori* model that included all hypothesized paths. A chi-square goodness of fit index, $\chi^2(48, N=860) = 308.139, p < .001$, statistically significant at the .05 level, indicated a poor fitting model. However, an RMSEA of .056 (using a cutoff criteria of $< .05$) and CFI of .950 (using a criteria of $> .95$) indicated good model fit as well. In this case, the root mean square residuals, (RMR=.0301), decreased slightly from the previous model, and again suggested good fit. Overall, all of the fit indices indicated a slightly better fitting model with the statistically nonsignificant path removed. Comparing this nested model to its *a priori* version with the parsimony normed fit index (PNFI) demonstrated fit improvement from the original model. The first model (PNFI=.602) had a lower parsimony normed fit index than the nested model with nonsignificant paths removed (PNFI=.628). This fit index indicated model improvement, as PNFI values closer to 1.0 indicate better fit, and adjusted model met the requirement of a PNFI $> .50$, generally accepted as the PNFI index criterion for good model fit. All included standardized path coefficients between endogenous and exogenous variables were statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level. Table 38 shows the coefficients for each path for the fall grouping. Figure 13 displays the adjusted model with standardized path coefficients for the fall grouping.

Table 38.

Standardized Path Coefficients and Associated P-values: Adjusted Model (Fall Group).

Independent	Dependent	Standardized Estimate	P
Victimization	Engagement	-.217	≤.001
Engagement	Attendance	-.096	.009
Victimization	Intensity	.590	
Victimization	Verbal	.809	≤.001
Victimization	Physical	.536	≤.001
Victimization	Exclusion	.783	≤.001
Engagement	Behavior	.581	
Engagement	Cognitive	.903	≤.001
Engagement	Emotional	.823	≤.001
Engagement	Achievement	.199	≤.001
Attendance	Achievement	-.310	≤.001
Victimization	Achievement	-.114	.002

The relatively small, standardized path coefficients echoed the previous findings of this study. Victimization did not have a strong relationship with attendance as was originally hypothesized. The path coefficient between those two variables was statistically nonsignificant. The hypothesized paths between engagement and achievement (standardized coefficient = .199) and attendance and achievement (standardized coefficient = -.310), although statistically significant, were relatively weak. All paths between indicator variables and their latent variable construct counterparts were strong as was expected.

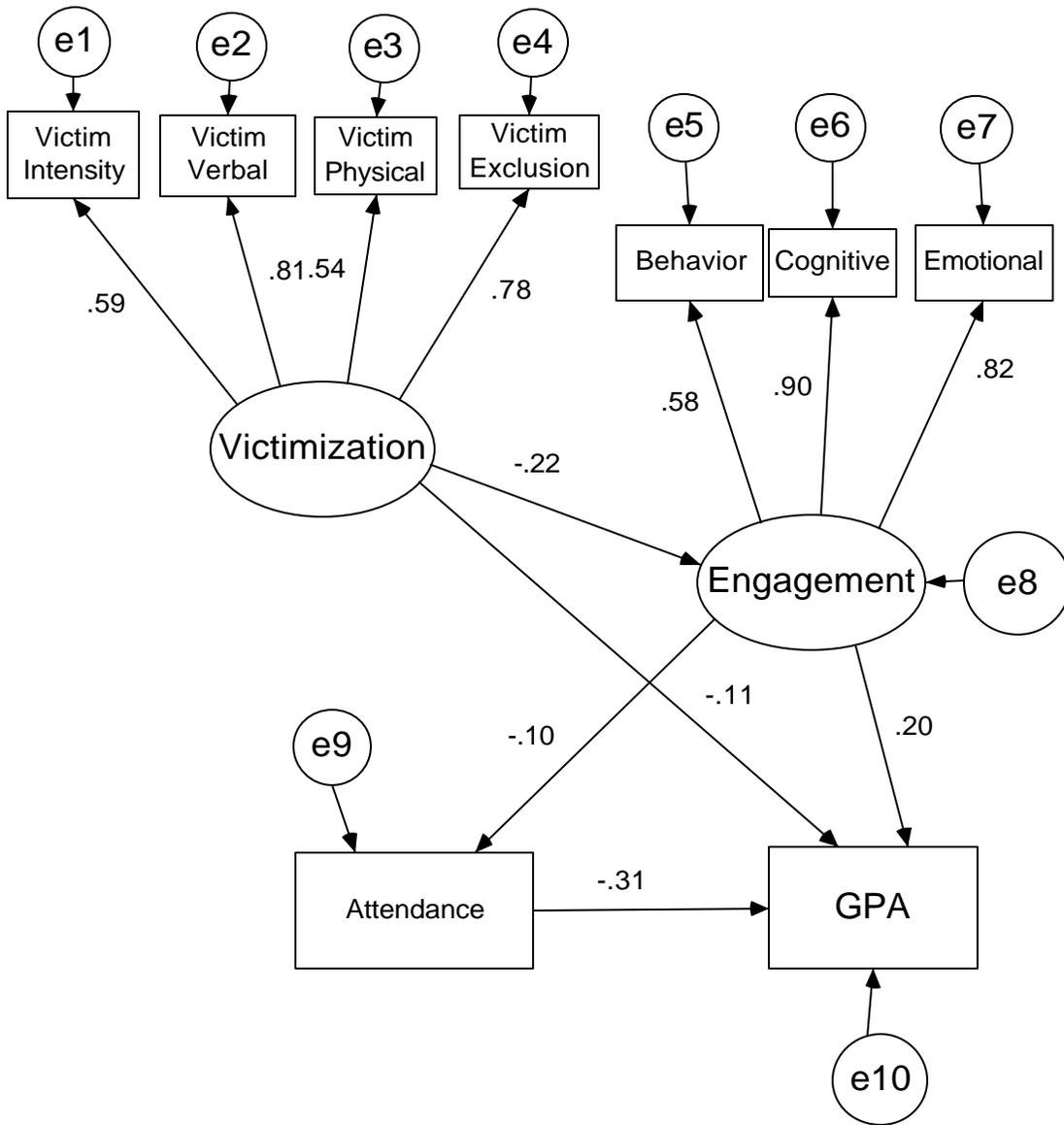


Figure 13. Post Hoc measurement model with standardized coefficients (Fall Group).

Removal of the statistically nonsignificant path between victimization and attendance resulted in slightly better model fit. In addition, the negative coefficients between victimization and engagement as well as victimization and achievement suggested that

engagement did act as a mediating variable between victimization and attendance. Table 39 displays the standardized path coefficients for the adjusted model spring grouping.

Table 39.
Standardized Path Coefficients and Associated P-values: Adjusted Model (Spring Group).

Independent	Dependent	Standardized Estimate	P
Victimization	Engagement	-.130	≤.001
Engagement	Attendance	-.133	≤.001
Victimization	Intensity	.680	
Victimization	Verbal	.853	≤.001
Victimization	Physical	.672	≤.001
Victimization	Exclusion	.807	≤.001
Engagement	Behavior	.665	
Engagement	Cognitive	.910	≤.001
Engagement	Emotional	.842	≤.001
Engagement	Achievement	.341	≤.001
Attendance	Achievement	-.311	≤.001
Victimization	Achievement	-.105	≤.001

The path coefficient between victimization and engagement for the spring group decreased from the fall group from -.217 to -.130 suggesting victimization had less impact on engagement in the spring. However, the path coefficient between engagement and achievement increased in the spring group from .199 to .341 suggesting a stronger relationship between engagement and achievement in the spring. Victimization still had a negative impact on engagement, and attendance was negatively related with engagement. As would be expected, more absences had a negative relationship with achievement suggesting the more classes a student misses, the less he/she achieves in school. Figure 14 displays the path diagram for the spring grouping.

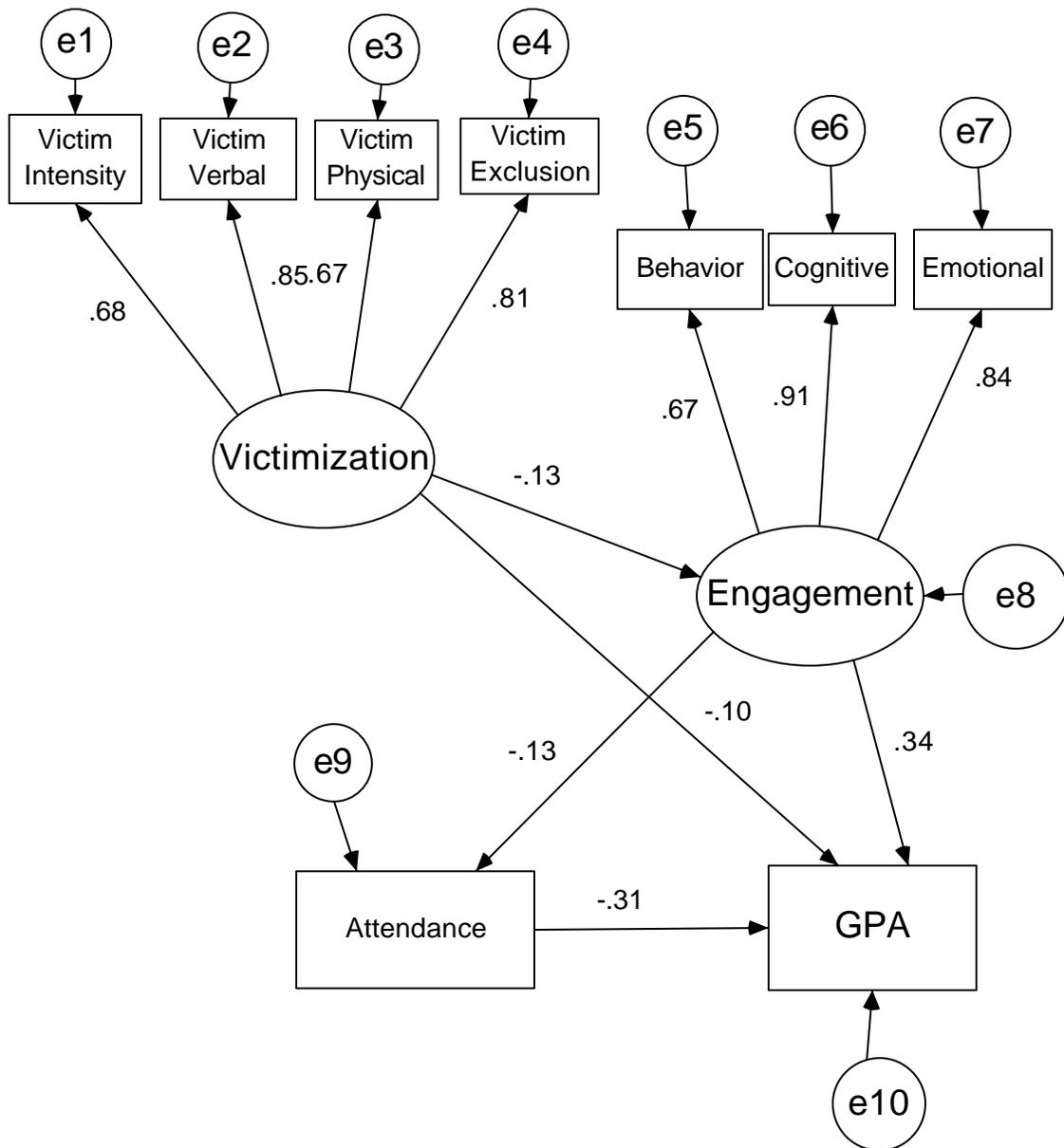


Figure 14. Post Hoc measurement model with standardized path coefficients (Spring Group).

The *a priori* model fit indices demonstrated good model fit, and the adjusted model showed slight improvement to model fit; Table 41 displays the fit indices of both models compared.

Table 40.
Fit Indices for Structural Model 1 and Adjusted Structural Model 1 (n=860).

<i>Fit Index</i>	<i>Hypothesized Model</i>	<i>Adjusted Model</i>
C^2	306.645	308.139
<i>df</i>	46	48
<i>CFI</i>	.950	.850
<i>RMR</i>	.0303	.0301
<i>RMSEA</i>	.057 [.051, .064]	.056 [.050, .062]
<i>PNFI</i>	.602	.628

In summary, the hypothesized multiple group model fit was good; however, with the removal of the nonsignificant path, the resulting nested model had slightly improved fit according to the PNFI fit index. The weak path coefficients between the predictor variables of attendance and engagement and the dependent variable of achievement implied that the hypothesized relationships were present but not strong.

Of the three structural models, a model, in which the fall variables were included as control, resulted in the best fitting model. However, building a model with only the spring data resulted in the good fitting model as well. Fit indices verified the latent construct of the peer victimization and school engagement variables, and path coefficients indicated relationships between peer victimization, school engagement, and student attendance were statistically significant, but not strong.

Discussion

Summary of Study

Put simply, there were not strong statistical relationships between any of the predictor variables included in this study (victimization frequencies by subtype and victimization intensity) and absenteeism. The goal of the study was to explore the nature

of the specific relationship between victimization and absenteeism, and all three statistical analyses used (correlation, regression, and structural equation models) confirmed that the relationship between the two variables was either nonsignificant, as in the case of the correlational and regression analyses, or statistically significant, but still weak, as in the case of the structural equation models.

This study was designed to assess the role of victimization frequency and intensity in determining how much school a student misses. The study examined 13 research questions concerning the impact of peer victimization upon attendance. Although prior research suggests that students' victimization behaviors do have a significant impact on attendance (Banks, 1997; Fried & Fried, 1996; Garrity et al., 1997; Hoover & Oliver, 1996), the findings from this study suggest that these relationships are weak, at least for the 6th grade student sample used for data analysis.

The structural models confirmed that school engagement might well be acting as a mediating variable between peer victimization and attendance. All analyses demonstrated significant relationships between peer victimization and engagement as well as between engagement and attendance. The structural equation models confirmed that peer victimization does ultimately lead to decreases in student achievement.

Perhaps the differences between the findings of this study and other studies on the same topic are due to the age of the included students. This particular study involved only sixth-grade students, while many other studies that found that absenteeism has a significant relationship with peer victimization included older students (Banks, 1997; Fried & Fried, 1996; Garrity et al., 1997). After the relationship between victimization and attendance was determined to be weak, it was considered that students older than 6th

grade have more opportunity to miss school; 6th graders, for the most part, are taken to school by parents, so they have less control over their own attendance. Victimized students who want to miss school might simply not have a choice to be absent. The Buhs, Ladd, and Herald study (2006) utilized a latent construct for student absenteeism in which students were asked whether they would choose to miss school because of their victimization levels, and upon reflection this may be a better way to represent school avoidance for young children.

Major Findings

Descriptive Research Questions

The first three research questions were developed to allow for basic data exploration. In essence, an overall feel for the different variables was the goal of the first three questions. The following questions were used to guide data exploration:

- (1) What frequencies of peer victimization behaviors do 6th grade students experience as middle school students?
- (2) What intensity of peer victimization behaviors do 6th grade students experience as middle school students?
- (3) What are the levels of school engagement for 6th grade students in middle school?

From the initial data analysis, it became clear that some of the students included in the study were feeling frequently victimized by their peers. However, most students indicated very little victimization overall. The intensity variable indicated that few students felt great intensity of victimization. Only a few of the intensity items had substantial “yes” responses, and the average “yes” total for students did not indicate that many students were intensely victimized. Perhaps most conclusive for this study, was the extremely low percentage of students who indicated that miss school because of their

perceived victimization levels. As would be expected for 6th grade students, most indicated they were very engaged while at school. School seemed to be a fun place for them, and most enjoyed their peers, teachers, and the school environment.

Correlation Questions

The next several research questions were included to establish relationships between the different variables of interest included in the different analyses. Questions about how victimization levels and absenteeism are significantly related resulted in the following:

- (4) What are the relationships between frequency of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism?
- (5) What is the relationship between intensity of self-reported peer victimization in schools and absenteeism rate?
- (6) What are the relationships between levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement in schools and absenteeism?
- (7) What are the relationships between frequencies of each of the three types of self-reported peer victimization and the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement?

Each of the questions was answered by examining the correlation coefficients between the various pairs of variables. Interestingly, none of the victimization variables were correlated with the absenteeism variable. The victimization variables were, however, significantly correlated with each other. It seems reasonable that students who face one type of victimization are more likely to face another type.

The engagement variables were significantly correlated with the absenteeism variable; however, interpretation of the relationships between the variables should be made cautiously because although statistically significant, they were all weak coefficients. Negative coefficients were expected, as it seems reasonable that as a

student's engagement goes up, the number of classes he/she misses goes down. The weak correlations between the variables of interest made it obvious that the regression analyses would not provide strong models.

The most interesting correlation coefficients came between the pairs of engagement variables and the victimization variables. The coefficients between the behavioral and emotional engagement types and all victimization variables were statistically significant. As one might predict, the coefficients were negative, indicating that as the frequencies of victimization for a student go up, his/her behavioral and emotional engagement go down. Interestingly, the cognitive engagement type was not significantly correlated with victimization levels. This makes substantive sense; victimization, theoretically, should hurt a student's behavioral and emotional engagement, but wouldn't affect his/her cognitive abilities in the short term. This portion of the correlational analyses affirmed the hypothesis that peer victimization effects on attendance rates could be mediated through student engagement. No direct link between victimization and attendance was found in the correlation coefficients, but a clear relationship between peer victimization and student engagement existed.

Regression Questions

The multiple regression analyses were included in this study as the precursor to the structural equation models. The weak correlations between the variables hinted that the regression models would not find statistically significant coefficients between the predictor variables and the dependent variable of absenteeism. The following research questions guided the regression portion of the study:

- (8) Does the frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity for affected youths predict their subsequent absenteeism?

(9) Do the levels of each of the three types of self-reported school engagement behaviors predict subsequent absenteeism?

(10) Does the frequency of victimization (by victimization type) and victimization intensity for affected youths predict total school engagement?

Although the different models had various statistically significant slope coefficients, all three had small coefficients of determination. These weak R^2 values indicated that very little of the variability of the dependent variable was explained by the predictor variables. Even with significant slope coefficients, we were hesitant to interpret the regression models. The previous correlation coefficients indicated that regression models would prove inadequate for prediction purposes.

Structural Model Questions

The structural equation portion of this study was modeled after another study in which a linear combination of student victimization, engagement, attendance, and achievement was assessed (Buhs, Ladd & Herald, 2006). However, it was hypothesized that different treatment of the variables might result in a fitting model that would help explain the relationships among these variables. The peer victimization and school engagement variables were treated as multi-faceted constructs, achievement was actual grade point average, and school avoidance was measured as real attendance rate. The following questions guided the model specification for the structural equation portion of the study:

(11) Does treatment of the peer victimization and school engagement variables as latent constructs rather than direct measurements serve to provide a measurement model with adequate fit?

(12) Does treatment of peer victimization, student engagement, attendance, and achievement variables different from the study by Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006) serve to provide a measurement model with adequate fit?

(13) Does a structural equation model controlling for the fall survey data, with the same latent treatment of the peer victimization and school engagement variables, demonstrate good model fit?

The three distinct models were an attempt to explore the problem from three different perspectives. The strong path coefficients from the latent constructs of peer victimization and school engagement and the indicators for those variables suggested that the survey was measuring the constructs intended. Treating peer victimization and school engagement as latent constructs was appropriate based upon the measurement model results. Fit indices indicated good fit, and statistically significant paths demonstrated sound latent structures.

The hypothesized structural equation model, with paths between the latent variables of peer victimization and school engagement as well as attendance and achievement, provided good fit. Although the model fit was good, weak path coefficients repeated the findings from the correlation and regression portions of the study. The strengths of the relationships between victimization, engagement, and attendance were plainly not what was hypothesized.

The last structural model controlled for the fall data. Model fit was good suggesting that a multiple group analysis with the repeated measures nature of the data represented was appropriate. Strong fit indices and statistically significant path coefficients between endogenous and exogenous variables for the rest of the model imply repeated measures treatment of the victimization and engagement variables provided a better model than that proposed by Buhs, Ladd, and Herald. The one statistically nonsignificant path, (that between peer victimization and attendance), echoed the findings

from the rest of the study portions. However, the models did provide evidence that the effects of peer victimization on attendance were perhaps mediated by engagement.

Summary of Conclusions

This study provided evidence that peer victimization and attendance did not have a significant relationship for 6th grade students. Each different portion of the study was designed to examine the relationship between victimization and attendance, and each had similar results. Either weak path coefficients, or statistically nonsignificant relationships between victimization and attendance were found throughout the analyses.

However, the structural equation models did reveal interesting relationships between the variables included. As would be expected, students missing more school, achieve less in school. Clearly, peer victimization had a negative relationship with school engagement, so the more a student was victimized, the less he/she was engaged at school. In addition, school engagement had a significant negative relationship with attendance, so ultimately, one can make the argument that peer victimization leads to decline in achievement either directly or indirectly through the mediating variable of school engagement.

Implications

The implications for this research study are not profound regarding direct relationships between peer victimization and attendance. The hypothesis that peer victimization and attendance are intimately related was not supported. However, the structural equation models supported the hypothesis that school engagement mediates the effects of peer victimization on attendance and ultimately achievement. In addition, the results were limited to 6th grade students, and as was previously discussed, perhaps,

models similar to those included in this study but with older students included in the sample would have provided stronger relationships between peer victimization and attendance.

The statistically significant relationships between peer victimization and school engagement suggested that students are impacted negatively by peer victimization. School engagement was predictive of achievement, so if students' engagement levels are decreasing because of peer victimization, then logically, their achievement decline is related to their peer victimization as well. This research could be used to support school-level programs designed to decrease peer victimization as direct interventions to increase school engagement which will in turn increase student attendance and achievement.

Limitations

Survey Issues: As the data were being analyzed prior to any model specification, a concern about the survey became apparent. The peer victimization items were listed for response by the students as "Never," "1 or 2 times," "3 or 4 times," "5 or 6 times," and "7 or more" in the last 30 days. When determining a cutoff for a student to qualify as a "victim," in previous studies, more than one peer victimization incident is considered the criterion to determine a victim. The survey design led to some ambiguity as to which students should be defined as victims for this particular study. A response of "1 or 2 times" could indicate both a victim and non-victim by the traditionally accepted definition of "victim." Upon reflection, a redesign of the survey would allow respecification of the item responses, so that one category does not indicate two different possible classifications. This would assist in interpretation of the item mean and would

allow for the creation of a categorical variable that identifies a student as a victim or not for other interesting statistical analyses.

Variable Treatment: Part of the skepticism towards the Buhs, Ladd, and Herald model was their treatment of the “School Avoidance” variables. In essence, they asked students if they would choose to miss school because of their peer victimization experiences. It seemed probable that many students would respond positively to that prompt despite their victimization levels; most students would like to miss school if asked. Actual attendance appeared to measure the construct of school avoidance more accurately. Prior to the analyses for this study, it was hypothesized that attendance would be a better measure for “school avoidance,” but after analysis and recognition of the skewed nature of the attendance data, a different view of attendance for 6th grade students emerged. Sixth-grade students are generally too young to skip school. Generally, younger children are still under strong guidance from their parents. Often, parents are in charge of getting younger children to school, so the opportunity for the student to skip diminishes. The objective treatment of an attendance measure in this study may have led to the finding that victimization and attendance are not significantly related. An actual attendance measure might be better for older students, especially those who have responsibility for getting themselves to school.

Data Missingness: Listwise deletion was used as the method of dealing with data missingness. It was determined that data imputation for this particular study would result in strong bias, as students with data missingness generally were missing 50% of their possible survey responses. Data imputation can be a powerful method for dealing with missing data, but only when a small percentage of the data are being imputed. However,

in this study, listwise deletion eliminated over 300 student cases, a significant loss of power. In hindsight, it would have been advised to attempt to get to those students who missed the spring survey for another administration attempt. Most limiting to listwise deletion of missing data was that students who missed the spring survey missed because they were absent; perhaps, many of the students who would have provided interesting data regarding absenteeism were left out because they were, in fact, absent themselves.

Recommendations for Further Study

A suggestion for further research would be to identify those students who indicated substantial victimization and get direct information about their absence rates via interview or survey. We believe that much of the relationship between victimization and attendance was lost in these analyses because many students were missing school for other reasons. By including all cases, because the victimized students were so limited in number, their effects tended to be diminished. In other words, the moderate variability for the attendance variable was attributed to many other variables not included in the analyses. If only those students with high victimization levels were included in the analyses, the relationships between victimization and attendance may be easier to model. More information about the relationships between peer victimization and other variables may emerge if only those who had significant victimization were included in the analyses. Rather than include all of the student data, it would be reasonable to identify students as victims or not, and then begin to look at differences between/among the groups. It may be easier too. Simple t-tests between groups identified as victims and others identified as not would provide information regarding victimization and absenteeism. The data representing the minority of students who were victims may have

been lost in the analyses because of the larger number of students who were not identified as victims but still missed considerable amounts of school.

Another observation during the various analyses for this study was that the engagement variable might not be capturing exactly what was intended. The hypothesis driving the models was that peer victimization should lower school engagement, which in turn might lead to lower attendance and possibly lower achievement. In looking at the items measuring engagement more closely, it became apparent that the items are measuring constructs about how a student behaves in school as well as some of the innate cognitive skills a student might have that supports academic success. With reflection, however, it seems that a better hypothesis would be that peer victimization has significant effects on attitude or a self-esteem construct, and in turn, changes in attitude and/or self-esteem can impact attendance and achievement. We recommend to try using an attitude or self-esteem variable as opposed to a school engagement construct.

Although the data for this study were repeated measures, to see the real impact that peer victimization has on attendance it would be better to have a longer period of time between surveys, and perhaps more survey administrations so the data are truly longitudinal in nature. It is possible that the effects of peer victimization take longer than just a few months to significantly impact a student's attendance or engagement levels. A better study, albeit more difficult, would be to monitor students classified as victims over longer periods of time to determine if there is a downward trend in attendance or engagement. This would take into account the possibility that peer victimization impacts take effect over long periods of time as suggested by the research in the area. However,

the ethicality of a study in which victims are identified and no interventions are employed is questionable.

Throughout this study, ideas for other studies with this particular dataset became apparent. It would be interesting to examine gender differences for the variables of interest. Equally, one could explore the differences found between the various ethnicities and at-risk populations. In addition, the repeated measures nature of the data could allow for the examination of differences in peer victimization, school engagement, attendance, and achievement over the two different time points. Determining the significance of differences between fall and spring victimization levels would be an interesting topic for another study. An analysis of the significance of the differences across the fall and spring survey for the other included variables is warranted as well. Another comparison for responses to the victimization items, (or any of the other variables for that matter) deserving further analysis would be to look at gender, ethnicity, or at-risk status differences over time. It would be fascinating to study whether certain student characteristics like gender or ethnicity mediate the effects of peer victimization on variables like attendance, engagement, and/or achievement.

Another possibility for study would be to create categories of peer victimization based on the data and use logistic regression models to determine the significance of the other variables in predicting students in those categories. For instance, one could create a variable with “fall victim,” “spring victim,” “both victim,” and “neither victim” categories and determine if attendance rates or engagement significantly predict placement of students in those categories. This might be a better way of dealing with the repeated measures nature of the data. However, this would necessitate a more specific

method for categorizing students as victims, and as mentioned previously, the survey questions as scored leave some ambiguity to the victimization variable.

Reflections

As the data analyses for the study were being done, it became clear that preliminary data analysis prior to the establishment of the research questions and hypotheses would have been advisable. When the correlation coefficients between the proposed independent variables and the dependent variable of attendance were found not to be statistically significant, some of the other proposed statistical analyses became obsolete, as all three analyses were basically looking for the same non-existent linear relationships between the variables of interest.

The first major change in the research questions that would result from knowing that few significant correlation coefficients exist between the independent variables and attendance would be to not use multiple regressions to determine the predictive strength of the various variables. Weak correlations suggest regression equations will be nonsignificant. For the most part, the victimization variables were not predictive of attendance. Similarly, the engagement construct was not significantly predictive of attendance. In addition, the victimization variables were not significantly predictive of school engagement.

In addition, it became clear that the longitudinal nature of the data was not being utilized to its potential. It seems obvious now that determining the presence of statistical differences between the fall and spring survey would be worthy of investigation, but hypotheses that would drive these analyses were not included in this study. Throughout the data analysis, other analyses worthy of exploration became apparent, such as analysis

of differences across time, as well as analysis of differences between gender, or differences among ethnicities and at-risk statuses.

A final reflection for this project speaks to the difficulty of statistical modeling in general. All of the models used in this study made sense to us and worked well for problems posed for classroom exercises; however, in real practice, when the many different problems arose all at the same time (issues like data missingness, variable distributions, hypothesizing substantive models), statistical modeling became a whole new challenge. The lesson learned was that real studies are never as clean as those found in classrooms for learning exercises, and the challenge was vast.

Final Summary

In summary, a repeated measures dataset examining the relationships between peer victimization and attendance has potential for interesting analyses; the research questions posed for this particular study, however, did not access that potential, nor do the results lead to any great benefit to this area of research. The most significant outcome was finding significant relationships between victimization and engagement, as well as engagement and achievement, which in effect suggested working to lower peer victimization could eventually enhance achievement. In addition, the strongest relationship found was that between school engagement and achievement, so interventions designed to improve student engagement might be the best method for increasing student learning.

Addressing the previously suggested recommendations could possibly enhance the usefulness of this study to support positive change in our schools. A similar study with older students, or perhaps a longitudinal view of victimized students over a longer

period of time with more data points would provide more interesting results. In hindsight, questions regarding differences between groups may have been more interesting to address.

Frankly, it is possible that high profile events, such as the Columbine shootings, have led to increased attention to peer victimization in schools, and the weak relationships found between the victimization variables and attendance are a product of this new sensitivity. Schools have changed drastically over the last ten years; a new focus on student safety and anti-bullying campaigns has emerged. Schools have new procedures around security; most schools have adopted “no tolerance” policies around peer victimization. Teachers and school staff have become more sensitive to bullying behaviors, and intervention may be coming more readily for victimized students. It is quite possible that students are simply not victimized at levels that would cause significantly negative effects on attendance and achievement. Also, victims may be feeling more supported by teachers and school staff, and subsequently, their behaviors and attitudes toward school are not significantly changed when peer victimization behaviors are faced. Survey research of the type done in this study has limits on what it can tell us about how victims actually feel about being bullied. Study 2 was designed with this serious limitation in mind.

Chapter Three -- Study 2

How the Bully-Victim Relationship is Experienced by Two Sets of Victims: A Qualitative Study of Some Young Adults Who Overcame Being Bullied, And Some Who Did Not

Relatively little qualitative research has been conducted into how victims actually experience their victimization. Back in 1997, Smith wrote that “the school bullying work could make more use of qualitative methods and case study material: given the overall volume of work, we know surprisingly little about the dynamics of the school bullying relationship” (Smith, 1997, p. 251); since that time, qualitative research into the bully-victim relationship and its meaning to its participants has been somewhat meager (Bowles & Lesperance, 2004; Craig et al., 2000; Espelage & Asida, 2001; Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008; see Mishna, 2004; Mishna & Alaggia, 2005; Oliver & Candappa, 2007; Peterson & Ray, 2006a; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). Indeed, there is “a real lack of qualitative research related to the phenomenon of bullying and being bullied” (Bowles & Lesperance, 2004, p. 95). Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) note that

The meanings of bullying, namely individually and socially constructed ways to interpret experiences and behaviors relating to this phenomenon, have been overlooked in research, to a great extent because studies so far have been representatives of the quantitative research paradigm. (p. 135)

They go on to suggest that “bullying research would now benefit from qualitative studies in which the interest is not in finding results that can be generalized to large number of people, but to shape our understanding of the phenomenon by focusing on the context” (p. 135).

The few existing qualitative studies use interviews and observations to delve into what the experience of victimization means to children who have been victimized, and the overall relational context in which victimization occurs. Two particularly interesting

qualitative studies were performed by Bowles and Lesperance (2004) and by Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003). Bowles and Lesperance (2004) conducted a phenomenological study exploring what the experience of being bullied is for adolescent male victims. Through a series of four in-depth interviews of three rural Nevada middle school boys identified by school nurses or counselors as having reported being victimized, the authors identified two themes as emerging from the students' own words: one of "the importance of connection" (with family, peers, self, and school/learning), and the other of "ways of dealing with it" (or, how victims explained their ways of coping with bullies) (Bowles & Lesperance, 2004, p. 97). Although the sample was quite small and demographically unrepresentative, the themes of connection and coping arising from the children's victimization experiences (and the authors' recommendation that additional studies be done to broaden our perspectives on the bullying experience) are worthy of being pursued.

A second unique qualitative study was conducted by Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) in Finland. The researchers were "interested in revealing the ways bullying is interpreted and constructed in the context of school class community" (p. 135). Like the peer relationship quantitative researchers discussed above, Terasahjo and Salmivalli understand there to be "no sharp distinction between bullying relationships of the peer group and other cultural life" (p. 136). In other words, bullying is not a unique relationship, in and of itself, but is one of many relationships, to be best understood within the social and cultural context from which it grows.

To explore this notion, Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) used a bullying survey instrument to identify three elementary school classrooms (out of a total of 45) in which

bullying problems were “clearly” exhibited. The 74 students in these three classes were interviewed in same-sex peer groups formed through social maps drawn by the children. They were first asked about drawn pictures of ten bullying situations, with the rest of the interviews being more open-ended in nature (although questions about the reasons for bullying and each child’s relationship to bullying were included in every interview). The interviews were all transcribed, and the authors used “discourse analysis” to identify and explicate the “interpretive repertoires” used by students to afford meaning and context to their bullying experiences.¹³ Four interpretive repertoires were drawn from the children’s words: (a) bullying as intentional harm doing (including empathy towards the victims); (b) bullying as harmless (underestimating the problem); (c) bullying as justified (the “odd student” deserving of being victimized); and (d) “girls’ talk” (particular and peculiar ways in which girls discussed bullying).

In their discussion of their analyzed data, Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) assert that their “findings seem to support the view of bullying as group phenomenon which is constructed in the interchanges of the whole school class” (p. 152; see Jones, et al.,(2008)). The authors broaden the scope of their discussion beyond the classroom walls, however. They take pains to point out that many of the children’s interpretive repertoires – particularly those that revolve around victims’ being deserving of victimization because they are somehow “different” – are manifestations of discourses continually taking place in the larger culture of which the children are a part. They

¹³ “Discourse analysis” is described as a “qualitative research methodology which is sensitive to basic assumptions of social constructionism” and that focuses “on the different ways in which texts are organized, and on the consequences of using some organizations rather than others” (Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003, p. 138). An “interpretive repertoire” is defined as “recurrently used systems of terms for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena” (Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003, p. 139, citations omitted).

reference the “discourse of homogeneity” in society at large, as often manifested in “open hostility towards foreigners” (p. 152), for example. They conclude by drawing attention to “the fact that the world of children is not separated from the discursive world surrounding the school class. The wider interpretative resources of our culture are also included in children’s speech” (p. 152). Thus, the authors situate the bullying experience not only in the relationship between the bullying and the victim, but in the larger contexts of the classroom, and then the society or culture beyond. See Rigby (2006), examining the potential relationship between bullying in schools and aggression between nations in an international context.

Unfortunately, some of the very few qualitative bullying studies out there limit themselves by employing qualitative data collection methods to create what are really quantitative studies – analyzing the data from a quantitative perspective (*e.g.*, counting the number of instances that certain types of aggressive behaviors were observed (Craig et al., 2000) or the number of times that particular coded responses were made to structured interview questions (Smith et al., 2004b)), and thereby losing a wonderful opportunity to mine observed data for deeper meanings about the bullying experience.

Nonetheless, largely heretofore neglected qualitative approaches – especially those of a more open ended or less quantitatively skewed variety -- can be “a wonderful method of exploring real-life experiences students have had with bullying and victimization” (Espelage & Asida, 2001, pp. 58-59). They can provide an opportunity to unearth the meanings ascribed to victimization experiences by the victims themselves—both within the bullying relationship itself and within the broader social or cultural context in which that relationship unfolds. Understanding more about these

meanings may provide insight into how victims might best go about surviving and thriving while and after being victimized.

Moreover, in view of the previously described deficiencies in the set of mediating variables heretofore tested through quantitative methods (see Part B.2., above), it might be helpful to use more open-ended qualitative approaches to tease out additional factors potentially mediating between victimization and outcomes that have been, to this point, undiscovered and therefore, unstudied.

Recapitulation and New Research Direction

At this point, we should look back to our initial review of the literature in Chapter One. Past research divides into two strands: one focused on bullying, and the other focused on peer relationships. Bullying researchers have relied on two very different kinds of justification for their work. Bullying should be studied first, because a tiny proportion of bullying conduct triggers horrific happenings, such as school shootings and suicides, and second, because children have a fundamental human right to feel safe in their schools. The bullying research itself has zeroed in on five areas of interest: (a) the definition of bullying, about which there has been much debate, but upon which a general consensus has been reached (bullying being (1) intentional harm-doing, (2) repeated over time, (3) in a relationship characterized by an imbalance of power); (b) the prevalence of bullying, reliable quantification of which has been problematic due to studies' inconsistencies in definition, measurement, and populations sampled; (c) the typologies of participants in bullying, with researchers having described characteristics of bullies, victims, bully-victims, and bystanders so as to inform bully prevention efforts; (d) the impacts of bullying, with studies having largely concentrated upon the psychological

effects of victimization; and (e) interventions, school-based programs for which the literature has striven to recommend and to evaluate, with little attention paid to the school-related impacts of such programs.

The upshot of the bullying research literature is that, while researchers have come to agree that a fairly high proportion of students are, indeed, bullied during the course of their school years, they have accounted for why severe negative effects (especially school-related effects) appear to be visited upon only a small proportion of those victimized.

The peer relationship strand of research views victimization not as somehow unique, but rather as one relationship point lying along two different continua: a quality of relationship continuum, ranging from health friendship to severe abuse, and a temporal continuum, spanning from peer rejection or acceptance to ultimate school (or non-school) outcomes. This line of research has tried to identify and measure some of the factors that may mediate between victimization, on the one hand, and outcomes (such as level of school achievement or psychological adjustment), on the other. While this quantitative approach conceptually makes a good start at addressing the unanswered question from the bullying line of research – that is, why negative outcomes beset only a small proportion of victimized children – the studies' choices of mediating factors and their possibly under representative nature have resulted in much of this outcome variance among the victimized being left unexplained. Nonetheless, this research model holds substantial promise for testing assumptions as to particular factors that may help a victimized child overcome his or her victimization and achieve positive outcomes, and which do not. Still, this research model proves fruitful in testing assumptions as which

particular factors may help a victimized child overcome his or her being bullied and achieve positive outcomes, and which do not.

The small number of qualitative studies gives some direction as to how the gaps in the bullying and quantitative peer relationship lines of research might be addressed. By looking to the meaning ascribed to victimization through the victims' own words – within the context of the bully-victim relationship as well as within the larger social and cultural context in which that relationship is situated – we may learn much about how they come to cope (or not cope) with their victimization. Additional mediating factors ripe for future study may also be uncovered.

This summary of the research literature leads inexorably to an articulation of the research questions for this Study 2:

1. Why do some children who have been victimized go on to have positive/successful outcomes, while others go on to negative/unsuccessful outcomes?
2. What factors in the school setting can be identified and tested that mediate between a student's victimization and his or her later outcomes in school and in life?

Understanding variables at play in the school setting that affect children who have been bullied and mediate between that victimization and their later outcomes in life may permit creation of more meaningful and effective interventions at the school level.

Research Design and Data Collection

The research design selected to explore these questions involved (a) using qualitative methods to learn from (b) the retrospective reflections of high school-aged young people from (c) two extremely disparate samples (a group of successful high school students and a group of incarcerated youth) (d) who were identified as having

been bullied when they were in grade school, and (e) who consented to be interviewed in depth about that past experiences with bullying and with school.

Qualitative Methods. To try to answer this question, qualitative, rather than quantitative methods were chosen, primarily for two reasons. First, open-ended qualitative approaches could help to tease out additional factors mediating between bullying and outcome that have been, to this point, undiscovered and therefore unstudied. Second, most of the existing research about bullying has been primarily quantitative in nature (but see Bowles & Lesperance, 2004; Craig et al., 2000; Espelage & Asidao, 2001; Hamarus B Kaikkonen, 2008; Mishna, 2004; Mishna & Alaggia, 2005; Oliver & Candappa, 2007; Peterson & Ray, 2006a; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, 2003). As a result, the authentic voices of the victims and the meaning of the bully-victim relationship to its participants have been, to a large extent, ignored. Moreover, the various contexts in which bullying occurs – both in the school itself and in the world at large – are not addressed in quantitative studies. Terasahjo and Salmivalli (2003) note that

The meanings of bullying, namely individually and socially constructed ways to interpret experiences and behaviors relating to this phenomenon, have been overlooked in research, to a great extent because studies so far have been representatives of the quantitative research paradigm. (p. 135)

Terasahjo and Salmivalli go on to suggest that “bullying research would now benefit from qualitative studies in which the interest is not in finding results that can be generalized to large number of people, but to shape our understanding of the phenomenon by focusing on the context” (p. 135). In their qualitative study, they were “interested in revealing the ways bullying is interpreted and constructed in the context of school class community” (p. 135). After analyzing interviews of 74 children, asked to talk about pictures of bullying situations, they assert that their “findings seem to support the view of

bullying as group phenomenon which is constructed in the interchanges of the whole school class” (p. 152). The authors broaden the scope of their discussion beyond the classroom walls, taking pains to point out that many of the children’s observations – particularly those that revolve around victims’ being deserving of victimization because they are somehow “different” – are manifestations of discourses continually taking place in the larger culture of which the children are a part. They conclude by drawing attention to “the fact that the world of children is not separated from the discursive world surrounding the school class. The wider interpretative resources of our culture are also included in children’s speech” (p. 152). Thus, the authors situate the bullying experience not only in the relationship between the bullying and the victim, but in the larger contexts of the classroom, and then the society or culture beyond.

Qualitative approaches are “a wonderful method of exploring real-life experiences students have had with bullying and victimization” (Espelage & Asidao, 2001, pp. 58-59), providing an opportunity to unearth the meanings ascribed to victimization experiences by the victims themselves—both within the bullying relationship itself and within the broader social or cultural context in which that relationship unfolds – and affording insight into how victims might best go about surviving and thriving while and after being victimized.

Retrospective Approach. The research questions seek to learn about why some children grow into successful young adulthood with positive school outcomes, even though they suffered the scourge of peer victimization, while others never seem to overcome the experience of being bullied and do not reach similar levels of success and well-being. To link up early victimization experiences of a child with later outcomes as a

young adult, there are essentially two routes to take: looking forward – from the early experiences to the later outcomes – or looking backward – from the outcomes back to the early experiences.

Ideally, researchers would look forward: begin with preschool, and longitudinally follow children’s experiences with schooling and bullying all the way through their high school years, to their ultimate school outcomes (e.g., graduation, college, employment, dropping out, incarceration, etc.). The data yield would be rich. The insights would undoubtedly be significant. But to do it properly, it would take upwards of 10 years.

That span of time, unfortunately, was not feasible for this author. Accordingly, this study used the backward-looking, retrospective approach: starting with high-school-aged youth who are in the midst of living through the “outcomes” in which we were interested, and asking them retrospectively to explore their past victimization and how they dealt therewith.

There are a handful of existing studies in which groups of older students or young adults have been asked about their grade-school experiences with victimization and their impact on later outcomes (Rivers, 2001 (childhood bullying recollections of gay, lesbian, and bisexual adults); Crozier & Skliopidou, 2002 (recollections of name-calling experiences); Jantzer, Hoover, & Narloch, 2006 (quality of friendships of college students bullied as children); Duncan, 1999 (distress levels of college freshmen who were bullied as children); Peterson & Ray, 2006 (grade school bullying experiences of older gifted students); Schafer et al., 2004 (adult functioning levels for those bullied in school). Jantzer et al. (2006) developed their own retrospective survey instrument through which they identified individuals who had been bullied as children, and the type, frequency, and

severity of bullying to which they had been subject; with the permission of those authors, these researchers used a modified version of that survey (Appendix C) to identify previously bullied young adults from the population samples described below.

Extreme Sampling through Two Disparate Sites. Two sites were pursued for this research which reflected the extremes of school success and its opposite. “Extreme” or “intensity” sampling is a purposeful sampling strategy geared towards finding information-rich cases manifesting and illuminating the phenomenon being studied (Patton, 2002, pp. 230-234, 243). Representing the extreme of school success was a large suburban public high school (“Liston High School”) with a well-recognized advanced placement (AP) program, located in a largely white, affluent and growing suburb. Most of the school’s students graduate, and most of those graduates go on to post-secondary education. Those students taking AP classes are considered to be the school’s most accomplished upper-classmen. Reflecting the negative school outcome extreme was a secure, all-male, ethnically and racially diverse juvenile correction facility (“Riverdale Academy”) to which adjudicated youth have been committed by courts for having committed a whole range of crimes. From the high school group, a sample of 35 high school juniors, male and female, was taken – enrollees in two AP classes in United States History. From the correctional facility, a sample of 65 young men aged 18 and over, whose length of sentence ensured that they would still be incarcerated through the entire research process, was used.

Participant Selection. As stated above, a retrospective survey instrument, developed by Jantzer et al. (2006) was used, with some modifications, to identify youths in the samples with past victimization experiences. The survey (Appendix C) asked if

the participant, when in elementary and middle school, experienced physical bullying (hitting, shoving, etc.), verbal teasing or ridicule, exclusion or being ignored, or the spreading of rumors, at least once per month – and whether these experiences were hurtful. Thus, the various different types of bullying behavior highlighted by the literature (Elinoff et al., 2004) were covered, from physical to verbal, exclusion from groups to rumor-mongering. The question about whether the behavior was “hurtful” provided an opportunity to determine whether or not the victimizing behavior actually was felt as impactful by the survey participant.

The survey was administered to the members of both samples for whom the appropriate consents were obtained. Using the resulting survey data, a pool of interview participants from each sample was identified, based upon the highest cumulative scores on the survey. From each group, the six highest scoring participants were selected for the primary focus of the data collection for this study: the qualitative interviews.

Interviews. Eight unstructured interviews, loosely based upon the author’s interview guide (Appendix E), were ultimately conducted, each of a duration of 1 to 1½ hours. Topics covered included the interviewees’ current circumstances and how they got there; their experiences with school bullying; the actions they took in response to the bullying; the actions taken by school personnel in response to the bullying; and their understanding of bullying’s place in the world (whether it could ever be prevented, whether it happens between adults, and what would have to happen to make bullying go away). Each interview was recorded (with the interviewee’s permission) and transcribed. Copies of the transcripts were mailed, with a return, stamped envelope provided, to the participants for their review, corrections, and input. Only the high school students

returned their copies, with minimal comments. The author reviewed each transcript multiple times, coding them and analyzing them for themes, from which the following findings and results emerged.

Data Analysis

The data collected for this study has been analyzed pursuant to the qualitative methodology of Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship (Eisner, 1998). In keeping with the research questions for this study, this qualitative tradition focuses upon schools: on “illuminating the educational state of affairs” (Eisner, 1998, p. 71) and on examining them in context “by talking with students about their work, and asking their views about what is transpiring” (Eisner, 1998, p. 81). This tradition also engages the researcher and reader in making judgments about the thing being researched, thereby allowing others (educators, policy-makers) to learn the lessons captured by the researchers such that suggestions for improvements might ensue – with an eye towards contributing to the enhancement of the educational process itself (Eisner, 1998, p. 114). Under this methodology, the data analysis divides into four parts: Description, Interpretation, Evaluation, and Thematics (Eisner, 1998, pp. 88-105).

The Description Section here is devoted to portraits of six of the eight young people who were interviewed. Following the Description is Interpretation, in which the data already presented descriptively is reconfigured, in a sense, to enable the reader to view it through the lenses of the three conceptual frameworks or spheres outlined below: the Sphere of School, the Sphere of School and Society, and the Sphere of Private and Public Concerns. This Interpretive analysis then leads into Evaluation, driving to the heart of the research questions posed in this study: what went on in school that helped

students overcome being bullied by their peers and move on with their lives, and what did the schools do (or not do) that hurt, or got in the way? Finally, a Thematics section suggests three fundamental needs of school children thematically emerging from the analysis of the data.

Description: Six Portraits of Bullied Kids

The point of the Description portion of the data analysis in Educational Criticism and Connoisseurship is to enable the reader vicariously and vividly to experience the studied place or process (Eisner, 1998). Descriptions of six of the interviewees that follow – two high achieving students from Liston High (Warren and Sara) and four of the incarcerated young men at Riverdale Academy (Benny, Luis, Jeff, and Dick) – represent the researchers' attempt to afford the reader as nuanced a sense as possible of what the research participants experienced in their respective school settings both during and after being picked on by their peers. For each of the six participants, five areas are covered below: first, a brief physical description; second, a summary of their backgrounds (family, school, incarceration); third, a sketch of their experience with being bullied and how it made them feel; fourth, the strategies they developed to cope with the bullying; and fifth, the question of why – in their opinions, why did bullying happen to them in school, and why does it happen at all?

Warren is a tall, lanky, pale and pimply, short-haired young man. He has braces on his teeth, and a slight but noticeable scar on his upper lip, recognizable as the vestiges of a repaired cleft lip and/or palate. He is neatly dressed, in a non-descript collared shirt and pressed pants. He is quiet and respectful. When he begins to speak, it is clear that his voice has recently changed. He is soft-spoken, but well-spoken. with a slight, dry

sense of humor and glimmers of imagery and insight that occasionally poke out. When he seems a bit awkward or nervous as he talks about his bullying experiences, he reaches out to pet his mid-sized, energetic dog – he pets while he talks, and begins to talk more freely.

Warren is the son of two United States Air Force officers, one a PhD economist serving in Iraq, the other a retired judge advocate general officer now teaching law at a local college. Both attended the Air Force Academy, as do one of Warren’s cousins and his older sister. While Warren is now a thriving junior AP student at Liston High School – enjoying a “strict curriculum,” surrounded by “fantastic” teachers, and immersed both in challenging academics (a straight A student) and numerous extracurricular activities (varsity tennis, saxophone in the jazz and concert band) – the two years he has spent at Liston have been a relatively long and happy sojourn. As a result of growing up in a military family, Warren lived in five different places growing up, and felt like he was moving all the time.

As a result of the constant moving, Warren had often to suffer being “the new kid.” He talks of “when I moved and was like excluded from groups” as being “almost isolation, in a way.” He says “when you’re not around other people, you look a lot smaller,” such that “when I moved to a new place...I kind of fear the big people.” It made him feel “really vulnerable.” He also suffered bullying because of another aspect of his life over which he had no control: his cleft lip and palate. Although the scar is barely visible now, when he was younger, it triggered a period of abuse – in the form of teasing, happening a few times a week, usually on the bus to and from school – at the hands of older, bigger students. He did not know what to do about it; the teasers were

bigger, “intimidating,” and he felt helpless and “small” in the wake of their torment of him. One day, it just stopped. Someone kicked the worst offender of the bus, he never came back, and to this day, Warren is not exactly sure why.

While Warren could never figure out how to deal with those who teased him for his physical differences, he did develop strategies for coping with the hurtful exclusion. He says he would search out other students who seemed to be similar to him in affect or personality – “someone else who was standing off by themselves like me” who were “fairly smart and nice...and not overly nerdy” – and find school pretexts to connect with them: needing a sports partner, or having to team up with others in “group projects.” In this way, he was able to make friends and minimize his isolation. He felt less small, and became less susceptible to bullying by others. But Warren was not in this alone. Teachers in each of his new environments seemed to watch out after him. He remembers teachers helping him; seeing him alone or excluded, “they would say, you know, who needs an extra person or why don’t you go join them or suggestions like that.” When he suffered bullying on the bus, he never knew why the bully got booted, but a bystander must have stepped up and an intervention occurred; Warren attributes this to the fact that the community in which he lived at the time was a tight one (American servicemen families in Germany) that took care of its own. Teacher and community support loomed large in Warren’s life. This support helped; school-sponsored anti-bullying programs (remembered as having to sit through compulsory video presentations), on the other hand, had little or no effect on bullies’ behavior; they were “very tedious and long and drawn out and nap times.”

Warren believes that bullying happens in schools because “that’s kind of kids’ nature.” Kids “just stick to their own...to the known, I guess.” Those who exclude and bully others are often the ones who come from rich families, are athletes, and who are bigger or older. They believe that they are “the center of the universe and everything revolves around them.” The victims tend to be quieter, “like me,” often “off by themselves,” smaller. He uses a dog analogy, as he thoughtfully strokes the family pet: when a kid is unsure of himself and feels “kind of small...along comes the big dog and they see a small dog and they, oh, I’m bigger than you so I can pick on you now...it’s just a part of nature, like I said.” The adults with whom he has lived and learned, however, seem not to exhibit this basic trait of human nature. You can’t succeed as a military officer, Warren believes, if you bully the soldiers below you. You must lead them, give them “constructive correction,” “not yelling and screaming” or pushing them around. It is the strength of this kind of example, plus the examples of certain teachers, that perhaps underlie Warren’s confident lack of doubt as to what the future holds for him after high school: the Air Force Academy, maybe going into law like his mother or foreign intelligence like one of his favorite teachers. School was always going to lead to someplace specific, someplace good and challenging, and Warren clearly looks forward to it.

Sara is petite, with brown, shoulder-length hair slightly layered (an expensive cut designed not to look like a cut at all). She wears jeans, a white long-sleeved tee shirt with something written across the front, and no shoes. She has a high-pitched, little-girl voice, that at first sounds like it might be without substance behind it. One she gets going,

however, Sara is not vapid at all; she is a highly articulate, thoughtful, a little arrogant, a problem-solver, and self-reliantly composed young woman.

Sara has lived in the same community around Liston High School all her life. She comes from a “blended” family, with three much older half-siblings who are married with children, two older siblings in college, and a 9th grade brother living at home with her. She is a junior AP student, taking a jam-packed course schedule (AP U.S. History, Honors English, Physics, Pre-Calculus, French 3, Theater Technology, Symphony Band) and playing both tennis and bassoon. The bassoon is one of her main passions, since 6th grade when her class was taken to try out instruments and she chose “the coolest looking one.” Sara has great things to say about her high school teachers (her English teacher who runs a class full of open discussion and debate, her Physics teacher who likes to “make us figure things out by ourselves,” and her History teacher who is “really fun”). Elementary school was, however, a different story. There, her class was grouped with a special education class, and the teachers “let the special education kids get away with everything,” and did not focus much on teaching anything interesting. She was bored and hated school. Things got better in middle school, where, for the first time, more advanced reading and math groups were introduced; Sara felt that teachers paid more attention to her, and as a result, she paid attention “because I had to keep up or I would have fallen way behind.”

Sara experienced bullying early on, in elementary school. She got “in trouble” for correcting her 5th grade teacher early on during a math lesson. That teacher’s reaction was, essentially, to bully her uppity student: she “definitely made me feel stupid and...not wanted at all because I was so much smarter than her...And then she definitely

isolated me...put me in time out because I was always correcting her.” Among the kids, on the playground, some of the special ed kids, who were often bigger and older, pretended to rape other kids during recess. That scared Sara, and she hated the playground, hated going outside. In middle school, the social scene changed. She recalls the eighth graders victimizing the sixth graders, pushing, shoving, name-calling. Some kids became “popular,” girls began focusing on make-up and looks, and boys began to “realize they actually had something in their pants that made them different.” Sara found herself becoming the focus of bullying herself. One boy verbally harassed Sara and another girl sexually, through crude and very public jokes. Classmates ridiculed her because of her lack of sports/physical prowess (competitive sports was all they did in middle school gym), and she felt “definitely isolated” by the more sports-adept students. Most hurtfully, Sara experienced derision from a girl with whom she had been close and was competitive academically. This girl began calling her names (“stupid,” “nerd”) and spreading lies and rumors about her on the bus. At one point, this girl, and a few others whom Sara had considered close friends, formed what they called a “hate club” about her. Sara was devastated: “I began to doubt myself if I was ever actually good at anything.”

What did Sara do in response to all this? She felt she could tell her mother, and she did. At her mother’s urging, Sara told a school counselor about the sexual harassment, and he let her “cry it out and then suspended the kid.” As for the “hate club,” she “came home. Locked myself in my room and cried a little while. The next morning I said okay, I’ll find new friends.” And, after a few false starts, she did so. Her studies and other school activities seemed to play a pivotal role in keeping her whole and

focused during these experiences. When she became mired in self-doubt about her lack of sports skills and the rumor-spreading, she thought “like wait, I’m good at school...So I’ll go back to that.” Sara plunged into her studies with renewed effort “because they kept my mind off things and they challenged me;” she “could kind of lose myself in English” where she learned to see the world from “definitely different perspectives” such that her own bullying seemed less important. She also forced herself to try school tennis, and “threw myself more into band” – and “I found out I really loved it and I found friends.”

Sara’s explanations as to why bullying happens in schools are two-fold. First, teachers and school staff rarely intervene. Many think “it’s better for the children to have some bullying in their life.” Bullying in the elementary school playground was ignored because the teachers “thought we were all being fun and jokes and stuff” and only “pretended to watch.” In higher grades, when bullying grew more subtle, even her beloved English teacher will not intervene when one student repeatedly tries to “take you down with words,” tormenting certain students in particular; the teacher cannot see that victimization is taking place, she “thinks it’s debating while it’s really not.” The anti-bullying programs instituted by the schools are supposed to address all this, but Sara says they are “lame,” “a bunch of crap because after they left the classroom you’re on defenses again,” and successful only at helping bullies “see what people might be doing in defense [so that] they could get around it.” Second, schools cannot control what goes on beyond their boundaries – and the roots of bullying, in Sara’s view, are firmly planted outside the schools. Sara notes that if “your dad or mother is abusive to you, you’re probably going to take that out on someone else because you think that’s what people do.” Sara believes that students witness bullying every day in their families (husbands

disrespecting wives, parents bullying children), and in other adults (teachers and coaches bullying students, parents trying to intimidate school personnel, etc.). While Sara is not optimistic that schools can do much to stop bullying under the circumstances, she thinks they ought really to try “catching it early” – in elementary school – “and telling them no, that’s not right” – and teaching respect, because “it would help if everyone respected each other.” Meanwhile, Sara has managed to develop enough self-respect to pursue, with a kind of pleasantly nervous confidence, her future dreams – going to college, to study music performance and English, essentially combining the things into which she “threw herself” or “lost herself” when school bullying threatened to overwhelm.

Benny is a very tall, painfully thin African American young man. He wears the standard Riverdale attire of white polo shirt and khaki pants. He sports wire-rimmed glasses, looks bookish, reserved. His speech is tentative, mumbling at times, with no trace of any kind of accent. Nothing hip or cool about him. He presents as being somewhat preppy and upper-class, and as being not entirely comfortable with that.

Benny was raised in an affluent suburb. His mother is a nurse, working in a well-respected hospital. His grandparents, who are very much in his life, have both been active on the school board of their suburban community. (His father is not mentioned once during the interview.) The suburban school district is known as high-achieving, with the bulk of its students graduating and moving on to colleges, many of them prestigious. Most of the schools that Benny attended were overwhelmingly white. For Benny, his time at school can best be described as his suffering from being very bright, and very bored. At first in elementary school, his interest was peaked by certain caring teachers – who recognized his brightness and “volunteered” him to do extra work in the

classroom – and after school activities. He was shy and tried to keep to himself. The shift to middle school was not good, as the work became boring and routine, and teachers no longer had the time or inclination to seek him out to provide him with singular challenges. At the same time, Benny grew to be a little more outgoing, and acquired friends. Soon, hanging out with these friends grew more attractive than attending too-easy classes; “I just sort of chose to hang out with the wrong crowd, and try to find ways to not go to school, and cause disturbances, cause I was bored and felt like it was an easier option.” By the time high school came around, Benny’s persistent truancy, and his getting into the occasional fight, led his school to offer him a choice between expulsion and withdrawal to another school, and his family transferred him to an academically more challenging school where his attendance briefly improved. However, the sway of the “wrong crowd” proved too strong, and in his junior year Benny was arrested for arson – “some girls after a party” persuaded him to help find the houses of some other girls who had gotten them suspended for fighting, and fires were set at those houses, burning one of them down. For that charge, his first offense, Benny was committed to Riverdale, much to the surprise and dismay of his close-knit family.

In addition to being bored, Benny was bullied in school. In elementary school, he was teased for being a “nerd” and a “teacher’s pet” due to the special treatment he received from his well-meaning teachers. To Benny, the more such treatment “unleashed my intelligence,” the more the teasing would come. By middle school, those sobriquets grew crueler. He was increasingly ridiculed for being “white-washed” – meaning that, by being and acting smart, he was not behaving as “black males” should. The ever-present, racially tinged epithets humiliated and hurt him deeply. The harassment continued into

high school, and evolved into physical altercations in the hallways. Only once did he muster his courage and fight back, and was suspended for his pains.

Early on, in elementary school, Benny coped with the name-calling by keeping to himself (he never told a soul about the abuse), and focusing on schoolwork with his kind teachers. In middle school, Benny became “more numb to it,” and tried to use self-mockery and humor as a defensive weapon. He turned to friends, who would have his back when he was bullied, telling the perpetrators “be quiet, leave him alone, and stuff like that.” But as the work in school ceased to spark interest, and friends grew to occupy a more important place in his life, the easiest way for Benny to cope with school bullying was to avoid it altogether by ceasing to attend school and hanging out instead. Benny notes that “I didn’t want to put myself through the ridicule, so I just wouldn’t go to class.” Bullying “kind of got me into the habit of running away from my problems, ditching classes...yeah, I tried to run away from my school situation, just to get away from it, which led me into the negative situation” that got him incarcerated.

Benny believes that the bullying persisted in part because the schools and their staff did not appear to do very much to intervene to stop it. In elementary school, the bullying was during recess and lunch when the teachers were not supervising as closely, and Benny did not tell them about it. In middle and high school, Benny believes that they did as much as they could, but they had “so many people to look after, especially in high school” that they had little time to pay attention to an individual victim’s bullying situation. Even if they had tried to intervene, Benny believes that, no matter what, bullying is “gonna happen.” He notes that “at some point, everybody’s been bullied. Benny thinks that bullying is a “learned” rather than an “automatic” part of human

nature, however. Kids learn it from adults: if you are a bully, then “somewhere you’ve been bullied, whether it starts at home, you ...learn it from ...siblings messing with each other...from parents, like parents messing with each other, bullying other parents.” He cites instances “inside of school,” and in “big businesses...where you’d always find the weakest person to prey on because they’re not going to fight back.” He notes that even on television you see bullying, and cites “Nelson Muntz picking on Bart” (the Simpsons). Kids take in all of this, and then the bullying is “kind of learned, where...it progresses with you like, you learn it, you carry it through high school, and you kind of keep that trait...through your older, your adult life. It kind of continues on.” Because of this cyclical learning of bullying behavior, Benny does not believe that school can ever really do anything to stop bullying within their walls; teenagers “always find a loophole around things.”

Luis looks me straight in the eye as he firmly shakes my hand, says “good to meet you, ma’am, and sits down to get down to business. He is a short, muscular kid, clearly outgoing, a little twitchy, not a hundred percent at ease in his own body. He speaks in a clear voice, emphatically and fast, as if he wants to make sure that he gets it all in. *Luis* mangles his grammar sometimes, but he does not seem to notice or care. He is very open and willing to be reflective as we talk. Two of his first recorded answers in the interview are “whatever it takes” and “I’m happy to help.”

Luis grew up with an alcoholic step-father who beat him and his mother, and a father in prison “for 97 years for doing the same things I was doing.” His mother was always working menial jobs to get by, and trying to go to school at the same time. His family had little, and they lived in “a tough place to grow up.” *Luis* recalls it being a

place with a “lotta gangs, lot of things to distract you...worrying about yourself, worrying about walking home after school, people trying to jump you, even as a little kid.” In his elementary school years, he got As and Bs and was interested in going to school “because of the teachers...I liked the teacher, that’s why I wanted to do good.” Towards the end of elementary school, Luis was moved into special education classes” – “not for my brain, it was, for like, because I’m ADHD, because I’d always finish the work and be all hyperactive and want to bother people.” But his teachers still “kept me active in school [and] always gave me some kind of incentive to want to do good.” By middle and especially into high school, that motivation faded. The work changed – “it was really hard, you had to be really responsible...and I wasn’t really ready for it at the time.” He found it “boring, all they would do is lecture...then they’d expect you to do a test on everything they said.” The teachers “were too uptight for me. They got a lot more kids to worry about.” So, instead of being motivated to come to school and do well to please his teachers, Luis “was always ditching school, off with my best friends ... smoking weed and stuff like that, not really caring about school. He got into fights, did drugs, was truant – and ultimately got expelled in the 9th grade. Drugs and fighting got him arrested at age 15, charged at 18, and incarcerated at Riverdale.

Luis remembers being picked on by other kids when he was in the first grade. He was small, and kids wouldn’t let him play with them – they were “always keeping me the outcast” – and he got teased, pulled off the monkey bars and hit in the ribs on the playground. Since his step-dad hit him at home, Luis reacted vigorously when he began to receive the same treatment at school from the other children. He fought back – and then “there started to be a lot of bullies and I used to have to stick up for myself all the

time.” The bullying intensified when he got put into special education – he was “labeled as a SPED kid” and the verbal and physical attacks ramped up. In turn, Luis broadened his efforts to stick up for himself: “I’d get my cousins and stuff and there’d be big fights, sometimes weapons would get involved...older kids would come to my defense...and other guys would get scared. Luis says the bullying made him “more violent, make me hate more. I just didn’t like people in general, it made me dislike people.” It caused him to “have a big trust issue with people.” Luis believes that, to some extent, being bullied had an impact on his drifting away from attending school: “maybe if stuff like that didn’t happen, I would of grew up a good person, staying in school, doing what I had to do.”

To cope with being bullied, Luis fought back, enlisting older cousins to back him up. After elementary school, when his positive relationships with teachers seemed to cease, he ditched school as well, at least in part to avoid the environment where bullying was at its most intense. (He also decided that he did not need school, anyway, because “I thought I was smart enough to make it on my own as a teenager. I thought it was boring. I didn’t see the need for it.” He believes that, in the older grades, he might have braved the bullying and attended school if the schools had provided “more interactive things, more hands on, more fun. Not always just lecturing, you know, I’m the teacher, you’re the student, you listen to this.”) He never sought to enlist teachers as allies against those who picked on him, even in elementary school when he loved and trusted them. He also never told his parents. He told no one (other than his cousins who joined in the fights) about what he was suffering at the hands of his peers for two main reasons. First, he strongly felt that he could “take care of it myself, maybe I’ll get them back ... I felt I could handle it myself.”

The second reason why he would not tell any adult about his suffering had to do with why bullying seemed to flourish in schools in the first place: the school staff's inability to deal with it. Luis believes that teachers knew it was going on – “but they really couldn't do nothing about it unless they'd seen it, I mean they couldn't just take our word for it...It's he said/she said stuff.” And telling his parents would have been a useless exercise because they could only have gone to the school principal, for whom it would be “he said/she said, at any given time a student could go say they're picking on me and they'll go over and ask them and they say they haven't, they say they haven't, they've got no proof, it's just like court, it's just the way. There's no proof.” So the very idea of obtaining adult assistance appeared to Luis to be fraught with futility, useless.

Luis believes generally that it would be futile to try to stop bullying in schools, because “kids are kids, and they're always going to be that way, bullying, and if they think they're cooler than someone else they're going to pick on them just for the fact they think they're cooler. That's kid nature.” Luis thought he was considered “uncool” and a target for bullying because he was poorer than others who “always had nice clothes, nice shoes,” to his SPED label, to being smaller than other kids – or simply because “maybe the thought I was weak or something.” Being perceived as weak is the source of bullying outside of school, in the adult world (which Luis sees as increasingly “corrupt”) as well, in Luis's view. He speaks of his mother getting “punked” at work by her boss who promised her a raise and never delivered; of the elementary school principal who was mean, “always barking at the teachers, barking at the students” just because “he was the principal, he was the boss.” Luis understands this adult bullying as having impacts on the schools because “school is part of the world ... It's not a different element.” The only

way that Luis sees that bullying could ever be prevented altogether – which he concedes is “not reality” – would be “if everyone was equal...if everyone knew that they were equal, and wasn’t better than no one else, maybe there wouldn’t be no reason to pick on the next man lower than, bottom of the totem pole.” When asked if that could ever happen, Luis sadly says “um, I don’t think so.”

Jeff is tightly wound. He is Latino, short, muscular, covered with tattoos. Some part of his body is always in motion. Throughout the interview, his hands are constantly rubbing the conference table. Sometimes he looks straight into my eyes for emphasis; sometimes, his eyes lose focus, as if turning inward so as better to capture the vivid image in his head of which he seeks to speak. He is taut, tense, and intense, ready to pounce at a moment’s notice. He is also very, very articulate, speaking quickly and cogently, and at great length, in response to virtually every question posed.

Jeff is close to his family: his mother and step-father (though they are now separated), older brother (a former gang member, now steadily employed), grandmother (with whom he lived for a time in a tiny rural town), and, as he got older, even his birth father, with whom he has worked construction from time to time. He trusts and respects his family. But when Jeff was a child, the rest of the world in the rough city environment in which he lived seemed hurtful and harmful. Jeff “got put in a gang” when he was eight years old; he “was a soldier” and “was just put in work” so that he could “put in [his] stripes.” Jeff was shot in the head when he was 10, when at a party he mistakenly got between his “original gangster” (his “O.G.” – the gang leader who recruited him) and a rival gang member’s gunshot. Jeff woke up two weeks later, and had to be taught how to walk and talk all over again. He was out of school for three months. Whereas

previously he had been “getting As all the time” in school, when he returned to his regular classroom he “got a lot of Fs,” because he had a hard time remembering things; “they said my brain wasn’t working right.” Despite some special education help, Jeff feels that he may not have learned anything in the 5th and 6th grades, because the teachers felt “he has a disability because he’s been shot” and therefore passed him regardless of what he learned or did.

After that, going to the large middle school “was rough.” Jeff recalls it being a “violent school” with many cops, and much security. He ditched school a lot. When he did attend, it was not for the classwork: it was for “selling drugs” or fighting or “girls, that was the only other reason. I didn’t really go for the work.” He was “always getting suspended.” He thinks that the school felt he was a lost cause – “I’m only one out of so many hundred, they’ll say, well...I’m going to help this dude who wants to learn, rather than help him who’s going to be a screw up anyway” – so Jeff “didn’t care either.” He also attended school in order to recruit gang members, since he felt pride in his gang, in being “the one that all the younger kids looked up to.” He became an O.G., taking younger kids under his wing as his O.G. had done for him. Jeff was repeatedly arrested and charged, for drugs, fighting, even once for attempted murder at age 14.

Jeff had a chance to get away from it all. When he was in the ninth grade and on probation, he moved to a tiny rural town to live with his grandmother. There, everyone knew his grandmother, and no one knew of gangs. Teachers and coaches were nice to him “mostly because of my grandma.” Jeff played sports for the first time, and excelled. (Back in middle school, the “jocks” and the “gangbangers” had nothing to do with each other.) He did well academically. But after a year, he moved back to the city, because he

just “didn’t feel comfortable” in the small town – “to me, that’s not who I was.” He never returned to school. Ultimately, he was incarcerated at Riverdale for having unloaded a pistol through a car windshield of a man whom he suspected of beating his female cousin.

Some of Jeff’s earliest memories of school were of getting bullied by bigger, stronger, older kids. He was “really small, a real small kid,” and “a lot of people made fun of me all the time, calling me a midget, and just calling me names and stuff like that.” He says that when he was little, he “didn’t know how to talk smack” and when “someone’d be talking smack to me, calling me names...I wouldn’t know how to say something back, get stuck in my own words and then make myself look more stupid,” so it ended up that “anytime someone would say something about me I’d just hit him.” Since the bullies were bigger than he, Jeff “started getting beat up a lot.” He was often suspended for fighting, even in elementary school. The bullying that he experienced hurt Jeff’s very strong sense of pride or self-respect. He notes that “if you’re being bullied, you don’t want to admit it...cause it’s like a pride issue, I’m not going to come up to some girl and like, I was being bullied, you know, it’s embarrassing.” Jeff also believes that if he hadn’t been bullied “back in elementary school, then I would have enjoyed school...went to every class, and not had to worry about being picked on.” He did not pay attention in class because “I was paying attention to them dudes that was always picking on me....and I was planning to get away from it. And then by the time I’d get done with my plan, the lesson was over, and I didn’t know how to do it.”

Jeff coped with school bullying by fighting back, by finding mentors who would protect him, and by avoiding school altogether. When his parents saw the obvious signs

of his “getting beat up a lot,” they enrolled him and his older brother in boxing lessons at the local CYO. This may have only reinforced in Jeff’s mind the wisdom and practicality of fighting back when bullied, and he got good at it. Soon, he began to bring weapons to school, so as to get better at it. Then, at age 8, he joined the gang. The gang meant that “I didn’t have to worry about getting bullied.” He always had “backup.” They had a nickname for him. He belonged and he felt safer, and felt that his O.G. looked out after him. (And he gladly did the same for other youngsters when he became an O.G.)

It never occurred to Jeff that he might find that sense of belonging or protecting mentors in the school community. He ditched instead. He now wishes that teachers or school staff members had intervened to stop the bullying that led him into his gangbanging, school-ditching life path. Instead, when teachers saw Jeff getting picked on, “the only time they’d intervene [was] when they’d see me swing on someone. They’d see someone talking smack to me...so I’d start swinging on someone and they’d separate us. And it seemed like I was always the only one that got in trouble.” He sees that “there was a lot of times they could have stepped in,” but recognizes how difficult it might have been for them to do so. He thinks that the teachers were afraid of getting hurt themselves by the gangbangers, and that they lacked the authority or support from the schools to take action against bullies. (His proffered solution for this is to expel the gangbangers, bring in more police officers, and obtain formal written consent from parents to take action against bullies at the outset.) Ultimately, however, Jeff is not convinced that additional security or authority would do much good against bullying. “Wherever you go, there’s always going to be a bully.” And that inevitable phenomenon results in kids like him fighting back and then, “getting in trouble ...It led me to being

committed, and screwing up my record...and now I realize, that was ignorant for me to ... react in violence and anger because someone was childish enough to try to pick on someone who was younger than him or smaller.” But at the time, Jeff’s reactions of violence and anger, his gangbanging and school-ditching, were the only available option, as far as he could tell.

Dick fidgets into the conference room. He seems at first reluctant to sit down, and then decides it is okay and seats himself. He does not shake my hand. He is another short, solidly built, muscular guy. His red hair is cut close to his skull. His face is covered with old acne scars and new blemishes. He cannot keep his eyes focused on any one thing for long, and makes eye contact with me only infrequently during the interview. He is always moving, never at rest.

Dick is the son of a single mother who gave birth to him when she was 16. He has a younger brother whom he adores and after whom he watches closely. Throughout his childhood, his little family moved a lot, from the city to the suburbs, to another state, back to the burbs, back to the city, etc. There was some stability for a time when he was in elementary school, where he was placed in the special ed class after getting held back in first grade. Dick enjoyed special ed, where he could draw and make things and construct projects. He found he could talk to the SPED teachers, and to the principal and the janitor as well. In the upper elementary grades, he lost these relationships; the principal got cancer, Dick got moved out of special ed, and “the father I got through school, the father I got pushed away from the staff. And then it just kind of went downhill when I got to 5th grade.” The transition to middle school was difficult, with the classes being much larger, the teaching seeming very different (lectures, writing notes,

paying attention), and more chaotic times in the hallways. He also transferred from school to school, as his family moved, during this period. At the same time, Dick often found himself in the position of having to take care of his mother (who may have had a drug problem and who appears to have been employed only intermittently), making sure there was food in the house for his brother, etc. To meet these responsibilities, Dick rather matter-of-factly talks about his stealing, his drug sales, his hiring himself out as protection for kids in the local park who felt that they needed it. By high school, Dick had gotten into a lot of fights, was deeply involved with drugs, avoided school attendance, and had compiled a rather hefty arrest record and file of warrants. Ultimately, Dick says that he “was just sick of the running, sick of the example for my little brother, seeing me go down the drain.” So he did a “small thing,” going on private property and doing a bit of unspecified vandalism in the clear view of the owners “so that when they called the police, they’d just come and get me.” That got him committed to Riverdale.

Dick says that he was first picked on by other kids in preschool. He “went through a lot of preschools, because I guess I was kind of violent back then when I was little too. Because I used to get picked on a lot. For no reason kids would just pick on me, that were older than me.” Dick would get mad when they knocked down his Lincoln Logs, or pushed him on the playground, or “try to put a bug on me or something.” Indeed, in the first grade he got a week’s suspension for kicking and hitting a child who had been picking on him. He says he disliked school because he got picked on so often and so severely, both verbally and physically. He was ridiculed for being a “SPED,” for being small and poor, and in late elementary school and middle school it only got worse,

with the advent of his severe acne. He found it to be “traumatizing ... It affects your family, it affects your getting more friends, it affects you in every type of way, mentally, emotionally, physically.” Dick felt the loss of control and the humiliation of bullying to be overwhelming: “you let someone pick on you, let them get the best of you, then they got control, they got a PlayStation 2 controller up your ass, and they’re controlling you and it’s ridiculous.” It made him distrustful, unhappy, hopeless, and disrespected, because when “you get bullied so much...it gets to you after a while. You can’t take it anymore...it feels like the whole world’s against you, to where your own survival is, you gotta do something to fight back.”

Dick’s central strategy for coping with bullying was, indeed to “fight back.” In elementary school, he lost most of the fights with the bigger, tougher kids, but by middle school, Dick started not only to fight back, but also to pick fights with bigger, older kids, fights that he “should have lost.” But he won, and began to feel that he was gaining some popularity with others as a result. It felt good – but he now realizes that this strategy, ultimately, was destructive for him. It meant that “you have to make a victim of your own, let yourself be known as a criminal ... until one time you get caught. And then you get in the jail system, and you come out worse than how you were before.”

Nonetheless, no other strategy appeared viable at the time. He had tried, back in elementary school, to tell teachers what was going on. He found that, generally, “they didn’t really care...they only wanted grades and make themselves look good, they didn’t care about us...they just wanted to [be] looking good for the principal.” So, he stopped saying anything. In middle school, bullying often occurred in the hallways, lockers, or bathrooms where teachers did not see it happening. And even when they did see it – and

Dick gives a slew of examples where he believes teachers did see him being bullied by bigger, stronger, richer, smarter, or more athletic students – they rarely intervened. Dick believes that, if school staff had intervened when they saw him being bullied, it would have helped him avoid much trauma. Especially after Columbine, school security guards would get involved if they saw a weapon, but would ignore it otherwise. Dick believes that teachers “should have watched more closely, took it more serious.” Instead, they appear to have thought that bullying is “just little kids acting little kids,” and that it “wasn’t that big of a deal.” Dick does acknowledge that bullying usually takes place out of the teachers’ sight and reach, such that “the teachers wouldn’t find out about it at all unless the kid woulda told them.” And the kid usually did not tell, because when they did, it often backfired. The teacher would bring the kid “outside the principal’s office.” He would have to describe what happened to a bunch of assistant principals, and “then they’d have to find witnesses” to corroborate the victim’s story. “And then nobody would say anything, so the kid look like he was lying. Then they’d punish the kid who got beat up.” Clearly, telling anyone at school about getting picked on did not seem like a good strategy for improving his situation.

Ultimately, Dick does not trust adults in a position of authority to take school bullying seriously and to intervene to prevent it or reduce its impact. And even if they did, bullying might be too deeply rooted in society as a whole for their efforts in school to make any difference. Dick observes that teachers experience bullying within school, just as their students do. He has watched as “a principal says something to a teacher, the teacher says something to the security guard, then they take it down on us, and then the social ladder started going down. It’s like a virus.” He sees the same “virus” at work at

Riverdale, where, he says, the male group leaders bully the female ladder “and then she gets mad and she bullies the coaches...and then they bully us around. And then we start bullying each other around.” He has also witnessed his mother get harassed at work by her bosses, and then “she’d take it out on the assistant manager, and the assistant manager would take it out on the other employees, and they’d try to take it out on me, and I’d be like, hey, you gotta calm down, I don’t work here.” He thinks the Columbine incident was rooted in adult behavior, because “it’s the parents’ fault of the kids that were picking on the kids, cause parents taught the kids how to do that, and the kids used that against them. And what would have happened if people would have took stuff like that seriously?”

Dick believes that someone should take it seriously – that it needs to be caught early, when little children are being picked on in elementary school: “because the little things are things that catch up, that build, it might take a while, but it builds...To where it just ripple effects and then they take it out on the other people.” But with him, no one did. Dick now says that:

I honestly think that if I didn’t get bullied, I’d have probably been a straight A student, wouldn’t be here, probably have a good paying job, probably e in college by now. I’d be focused more on school than anything. But cause I got bullied so much, I’m honestly going to hold that to where I’m at right now, all the negative things that happened to me, why should I be positive, try to change where I live. The world’s like 90% negative, 10% positive, it’s scattered allover the place. There’s not a whole lot you can do anymore.

Interpretation in Three School-Related Spheres

The literature suggests that the contexts in which a child experiences bullying may be critical to understanding it (see, *e.g.*, Salmivalli, 2001, p. 399; Terasahjo & Salmivalli, p. 135). It cannot be denied that certain aspects of the study participants’

backgrounds, having nothing to do with school – their families, their home-life, their available resources, the neighborhoods in which they lived – may have played a significant role in their pre- and post-bullying experiences (see Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Unnever, 2005; Espelage & Swearer, 2004; Griffin & Gross, 2004) . For example, surely Warren’s deeply supportive, college-educated, affluent family created a different set of circumstances for him than did Dick’s very young, single mother for whom he had to think up ways to scrounge up income to pay her bills for drugs and food. A school, however, takes each child as it finds him or her. While a school can make inspired attempts to engage families, to connect them with needed social services, etc., it cannot do anything to change the demographic background from which a student comes. So three conceptual frameworks are used here to interpret the data described in the previous section, focusing upon the world of school, rather than the world of home, and upon the broader social context in which the school is situated:

- the Sphere of School itself;
- the Sphere of School within the society of which the school is part; and
- the Sphere of contesting Private and Public Concerns, which intersect when a private bullying relationship between two students occurs within the public school setting.

The Sphere of School

The Sphere of School is explored through the dimensions of Eliot Eisner’s “ecology of schooling” model (Eisner, 1988, 1998), as enhanced by the work of Uhrmacher and Matthews (2005). That model focuses upon interconnected and highly interactive dimensions of schooling: *intentions* (the aims of education -- both what adults

think is important for students to learn and what values that conveys to those students); *curriculum* (the content of what is taught); *pedagogy* (how curricula are taught); *school structure* (the organizational forms of school); *evaluation* (how student and teacher performance is assessed); *administration* (institutional/administrative elements of schooling); and *school/community* (the workings of community within the school, as well as the functioning of school within the larger community). The purpose of using the Eisner model here is not to advocate or justify it as a viable theory; rather, it is to use the model as a tool to make sense of, to unpack, as it were, the data provided by Liston High School and Riverdale Academy participants in this study.

The question to be answered relating to these Eisnerian dimensions schooling is this: how have any or all of them affected the experiences of these victims of peer bullying? A review of the students' stories recounted in the above Description reveals that all of the dimensions of Eisner's model are in some way implicated, save one: that of evaluation (Eisner, 1998, pp. 79-81). (Although in the interviews, I did inquire about the testing the students experienced, none of them shared any information connecting that testing to anything at all about their bullying experiences or school in general.) The remainder of this section goes through the other six dimensions, beginning with school structure.

School Structure

From the interviews, two aspects of school structure – the organizational forms of school over space and time (Eisner, 1998, p. 74) – emerge as having had impact: first, the experience of where bullying actually takes place, and second, the experience of changes in how schools are organized at different age/grade levels.

The school's physical plant comes into play in students' experiences with bullying (Olweus, 1995, p. 25). All of the study participants concur that bullying rarely takes place in the classroom. Rather, it tends to occur in any and all places that the teacher cannot see or where he/she does not watch: on the bus, in the playground, in the hallways, in the lunchroom or lunch line, on the playing fields, and in the bathrooms.

Schools' change in their organizational structure as children age and are promoted also have an impact. For almost every participant, the transition from elementary to middle school, and, to some extent, to high school, had significant consequences (see Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 192). Classes grew bigger; there were more students for each adult (teacher, security guard, counselor) to manage. Dick notes the increase in class size in middle school; Luis tells of how he found middle and high school teachers to be "uptight" because they "got a lot more kids to worry about;" and Benny understands that high school staff could not do a whole lot about bullying because they have "got so many people to look after." Simply fewer adults per child were around to supervise student-to-student interactions. Moreover, beginning in middle school more time is spent outside the classroom, in the hallways, near the lockers – places where bullying is more likely to happen beyond teachers' watchful eyes.

It also stands to reason that the higher student/teacher ratio affected the ability of each student to enjoy meaningful access to one or more adults at school. A number of the interviewees – Benny, Luis, Jeff, and Dick – describe positive experiences with teachers and staff at the elementary school level. As Luis points out, in the early grades, "I liked the teacher, that's why I wanted to do good...it was always the teachers who kept me ...wanting to do good." That bond disappeared in middle school, where there was no one

classroom teacher overseeing a student's overall progress, and the student/teacher ratio greatly increased. For Benny, there were simply too "many people to look after" for each school adult; Jeff was "only one out of so many hundred," and stopped caring since no teacher seemed to care. Dick notes that, "the farther I got through school, the farther I got pushed away from the staff." It became hard to believe, for some, that any teacher or school staff person was actually interested in them or cared about what happened to them. Dick speaks about school staff "caring" only about "looking good for the principal" and not about him. It seems that changes in school structure, from elementary to the middle/high school, had a not insignificant impact upon the extent to which some of these students felt cared for and about by any adult at school.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

Curriculum and Pedagogy are the stuff of schools: what kids are taught and how they are taught it (see Eisner, 1998, pp. 75-78). Often, in the drive to understand the impacts of bullying upon students in school, any mediating role that might or could be played by the nuts and bolts of teaching and learning appears to be ignored (see Smith et al., 2004a, p. 322; see also Furlong, 1991 (regarding the role of curriculum and pedagogy in overcoming school disaffection)).

One notion expressed by these young people is that being challenged – inspired, engaged, stimulated, however one wants to put it – by something in their lives is very important to them. Luis notes that "if you're doing something, and it ain't challenging toward you, it's not worth doing;" Sara felt "repressed" by elementary school teachers who did not give her challenging work or allow her to learn at her own quick pace;

Benny decries the boredom of the work in middle school, its inability “to spark an underlying interest.”

The curriculum and pedagogy within a school can help to meet the need of students for challenge, for developing a sense of their own abilities (Furlong, 1991). For example, when Dick was in his elementary school special education classes, he actually liked the hands-on, project-oriented challenges that school had to offer. Benny’s elementary school teacher, noticing his quiet “intelligence,” would “volunteer” him to do extra reading and other things in the classroom, focusing on his particular needs and abilities. Sara reveled in the challenges presented to her in middle school, when students were placed into “regular” and “advanced” groupings, and the work suddenly captured her interest. Academics increasingly became for her a kind of refuge or safe harbor from the bullying and the hate club-building eddying around her, as she “could lose herself” in her subject matter when putative friends turned against her, and learn things useful for coping with difficulties in her world. Warren thrived with his school’s “strict curriculum” and his immersion into challenging academic and extra-curricular pursuits. For these students, their schools’ focusing on the particular kinds or levels of abilities that they each had (and crafting schoolwork consistent with those abilities) helped them to feel positive towards teachers and school.

For many of the kids, however, changes in school structure, as described in the previous section, led to a dissipation of engagement, a lessening of opportunities for academics to play a meaningful, challenging role for them. With the shift to middle school, the larger class sizes and the having to move from class to class were accompanied by abrupt changes in the pedagogy employed. Classes were now comprised

of lectures, rather than anything “interactive:” Luis and Dick talk about being talked at, having to take notes and pay attention, feeling like they were being told what to think, and then being tested on what they were told. Luis found it to be “really hard, you had to be really responsible....and I wasn’t really ready for it at the time.” The process of learning became more focused upon individual responsibility for rote-learned material, less geared to individual talents and abilities, and, overall, as both Luis and Benny assert, more “boring.”

For Sara, the move to middle school had the opposite effect. For the first time, she felt that school work was geared to her individual needs, and it became more engaging. her school pedagogy was in marked contrast to the boring, lecture-driven non-interactivity described by others: she had classes full of open discussion and debate, and teachers who like to challenge students by making them “figure things out by [them]selves.” As a result, for someone like Sara, what and how she was being taught could increasingly serve as a safe and stimulating alternative to focusing on the dreadful and demeaning behavior inflicted upon her by her peers. For others – like Benny, Luis, and Dick – middle and high school work did not present that opportunity; it was either too boring or too hard to follow, or both.

For some, extra-curricular activities also provided needed challenge and stimulation. Benny speaks fondly of the after-school activities for which his family signed him up in elementary school. Warren had his saxophone and his tennis. Jeff (when he left the gang-ridden city and moved in with his grandmother) found pleasure in sports. When some of the worst bullying was happening to Sara, she “threw herself” into band, and “found friends” that way.

When school-sponsored activities, however, sparked insufficient interest, these students had a way of creating their own entertainment or engaging activities. For Jeff, once he hit middle school, “the only reason I went to school...was selling drugs,” fighting, and “girls:” “I didn’t really go for the work.” His gang activities (*e.g.*, recruiting younger kids into the gang in the school hallways) created all the engagement that he needed, in effect becoming the extra-curricular activity that provided the “spark of interest” and refuge that school itself could not supply.

One last word should be said about a specific non-academic curricular element introjected into some of the schools: their anti-bullying programs. While not all of those interviewed remember having had to participate in such programs, every single one who did has nothing good to say about them. The programs were dubbed “lame,” “ridiculous,” “tedious,” and “a bunch of crap;” they helped bullies more than victims, by helping the former figure out how to circumvent the anti-bullying strategies of the latter (according to Sara); or they conveyed tactics that failed to work in practice (*e.g.*, James’s backfiring attempt to “say something nice” to the bully). As will be further discussed below, the message received by victimized students – by the school’s relegating bullying problems to the domain of “lame” programs, rather than supporting watchful school staff in addressing bullying as it occurred – was not a positive one.

School Community

As noted above, a student’s “feeling of connection within the school community” can be “a significant factor in understanding school bullying” (Morrison, 2006, p. 386; see Noddings, 2003, pp. 220-239). In what kind of school community did these bullied students find themselves?

All of those interviewed refer to a sense of “isolation” or aloneness that accompanied their being bullied by others – a frequent accompaniment to bullying noted by the literature (see, *e.g.*, B. K. Ladd & Ladd, 2001, pp. 38-39). Warren reports feeling isolated as a result of being excluded from groups. Sara felt isolated by bullying teachers and by her peers for her inability to excel in sports. The Riverdale boys all, in one way or another, talked about how they told no one about their victimization and had to “handle” it “on their own;” bullying was “embarrassing,” and it would hurt their pride to admit to others that it was happening and seek their help. Telling staff at school, enlisting adult support, was not felt to be an option for the most part (see Mishna & Alaggia, 2005; Oliver & Candappa, 2007), for fear either of being labeled “a snitch,” or of not being believed by responsible adults who would insist that they find witnesses and “proof.” As a result, they frequently dealt with bullying alone. Bullying can be a profoundly isolating experience.

The study participants all point to certain characteristics that served to distinguish them, even isolate them, from other members of the school community, and that they believe contributed to their being picked on by their peers. Warren and Dick both moved a lot, being the perpetual “new kid,” a status that fostered their exclusion from school groups and harassment by others. Warren coped with this kind of isolation strategically, by seeking out friends among those who appeared to be most like him. He received significant help in this effort from teachers, who made a point of inviting him into groups to work on projects so as to facilitate his entry into his new school community. Dick did not report receiving this kind of help.

Others were singled out for their smarts (or lack thereof). Sara felt isolated and bullied by a teacher whom she made the mistake of correcting in class. She was verbally harassed and had rumors spread about her by girls who felt she was too academically “competitive” with them. But Sara managed to find new sets of friends to support her among the other “smart” kids like her, and by “throwing herself” into band. She also found supportive staff, like the counselor who comforted her after her sexual harassment experience, and her English teacher, who helped her to “lose herself” in English. Benny, who was treated to extra work and attention by elementary school teachers who recognized his intelligence, was derided for being a “teacher’s pet” – name-calling that took on a racial tone in middle school and turned into calling him “white-washed.” Unlike Sara and Warren, there were no smart kids “like him” to speak of whom he could befriend, in view of his singular status as one of the only blacks in largely all-white schools. He eventually did find a community of students to support him, even when middle and high school teachers who had “so many people to look after” offered him little; he finally found friends and he enjoyed having them, but he admits that they were often part of “the wrong crowd,” buying him more trouble than he needed to have.

Luis and Dick, on the other hand, were made fun of not for being smart, but for being placed in special education classes; bullies frequently picked on them both for being “SPEDs.”

A number of these kids were derided for physical traits – race, small stature, high voice, acne, cleft palate (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Three boys for whom this was the case at Riverdale (Luis, Jeff, Dick) all resorted to fighting back, physically, in the face of that derision. Luis and Sean both eventually enlisted the help of others – cousins,

friends – to take down their oppressors, and seemed to find a sense of community in that cooperative fighting effort. Jeff managed to acquire a wholly different, non-school community (that had introduced itself into the school setting) – his gang – to make up for the lack of support he felt in light of the beatings and ridicule which he suffered. Warren, of the cleft palate, had a wholly different experience, however. While he was ridiculed on the bus for his distinctive physical characteristic for a time, eventually adults intervened and made the problem go away (by suspending the offender from the bus). Interestingly, Warren attributes this to the strength of the expatriate community in and around school, because “every American in our town knew every other American,” and people would step in to protect their own.

The power of escaping isolation, the yearning for a supportive community, seems to have been huge for some of these boys. Two of them – Benny and Jeff – tell of having had an opportunity to diverge from the pernicious path upon which they had begun, only ultimately to reject that opportunity in favor of joining with “friends” who had been there for them when bullying had been most intense. Benny got transferred to an academically more challenging high school and was attending classes and doing the work; but he fell back in with “the wrong crowd,” leading to the arson conspiracy for which he was committed to Riverdale. Jeff was doing well in his grandmother’s small town, full of sports and school work and away from gangs. But he was never entirely “comfortable” with that, and abruptly left to go back to the gang that had embraced him when times had been very, very rough.

Bullying had the effect of isolating these kids from a sense of community when they were in school. The two from Liston High managed to find both friends and aspects

of school itself (academics, extracurricular activities, concerned staff) that alleviated the sense of isolation. The Riverdale boys also strove to escape their isolation, but nothing in and of school seemed to facilitate that escape. They were ultimately able to find friends, activities, and community, but it was separate and apart from anything that their schools had to offer.

School Administration

How did school administrations – the principal and other administrative staff responsible for overall school policies and operations – enter the picture insofar as these kids and their bullying experiences were concerned? How do our interview participants perceive the efficacy of actions (or the inaction) of school administrations in the bullying arena?

One insight shared by a few is that teachers are not infrequently bullied or betrayed by their principals. Both Luis and Dick allude to principals either pushing around or failing to support their teachers and staff. Dick did enjoy a close relationship with a principal in the early grades who would talk to him when he “was having a bad day.” But by and large, the picture painted of school administrators was not a warm and happy one.

With respect to kids’ being bullied in particular, there was a sense that school administrative policies may have skewed when and how effectively the school would intervene. Some of the schools resorted to the “lame” anti-bullying programs as their central salvo in the fight against bullying. More importantly, it was clear to Luis and Dick that if anyone were to attempt “to tell” about a bullying incident by reporting to school authorities, the outcome would probably be to be hauled in front of a principal or

assistant principal, and put to one's proof – and, in absence of corroboration by witnesses (who would not come forward) or teachers (who saw nothing), the “teller” would be disbelieved and even punished.

Consequently, a recurrent theme seems to be that school policies dictate adult involvement in student bullying only when fights, drugs, or weapons are implicated – especially disheartening for the students (like Jeff and Dick) who were repeatedly verbally bullied with no one in authority stepping in, who would finally respond by “swinging back,” and who were then the ones who got into trouble. And that “trouble” would manifest itself in suspensions (Dick was first suspended in 1st grade!), expulsions, and/or “calling the cops.” This administrative approach to bullying and other negative school behavior – do nothing until matters explode, and then react by getting rid of the problem kids (even if those kids were reacting to rather than instigating the trouble) – came to be perceived by some of these students as the normal course of doing business in schools. Indeed, Jeff asserts that his school “probably should have expelled me...just kicked me out of that school period” once he became a gangbanger as a response to bullying activity. Dick, however, feels that school intervention at an earlier stage of his being bullied could have stopped matters before they had “ripple effects” into larger, more serious, and more violent incidents, and might have kept him in school, kept him focused in a positive way. Sara also thinks that schools’ “catching it early” is important. Nothing in school policies or practices, however, appeared to foster such early intervention, at least not as far as these kids could tell.

For these students, their schools' administrative approach to bullying, and the principals' behaviors themselves, did little to address a very real problem, or, if anything, made matters worse.

Intentions

The intentional dimension, as part of the ecology of the school, represents the value-laden messages, overt and covert, communicated by the schools, regarding the goals and aims of the education which the school is attempting to provide (Eisner, 1998, p. 73). It is the interaction of all of the above-described Eisner dimensions that produces the ultimate messages of intention which the students receive.

For Warren and Sara, they seem to have received the overall message that they are, at bottom, special people, worthy of attention and care. The adults in school have generally been there for them. Teachers and staff have helped them out, teaching them valuable, interesting, and useful things, in ways that respected their intellect and abilities. And the connection between school and the future that awaits them afterwards – going to a good college, for example – has been made clear to them. Their schools seemed to have valued them earlier, as children, and value them now both as young adults and as future productive members of society. School is not a waste of their time.

For the Riverdale boys, the picture is not the same. By and large, the school-related adults in their lives, especially in the older grades, have seemed not to care. The message is clear: if you are a problem, we will suspend you, we will expel you, we will put you in special education classes so as to remove you/isolate you from the rest of the population. If you tell us that you are being bullied, we won't believe you without proof – proof that is probably impossible for you to obtain. And, as you advance to middle

school and high school, we will no longer expend the time and resources necessary truly to teach you, to focus on your particular learning abilities and style, to ensure that you learn something in school that will be either interesting or worthwhile. You are worth, at most, warehousing until graduation day, if, indeed, you make it that far – and the expectation of that happening (and the teacher and staff support necessary to make that happen) is virtually nil.

Indeed, there is one intention or school aim that did not appear to have been communicated to these boys who ended up at Riverdale: that continued attendance at school had anything to do with their attaining a productive future as adults. While Benny and Luis, for example, understand now that their persistent truancy hurt them in the long run, it did not appear to them, at the time, that what might happen in their future was of any consequence to them. Jeff talks of rarely going to school, and, when he did, doing so only for drugs, girls, and gang recruitment purposes – not for “the work.”

If the message was relayed that attending school is important for the future that lies beyond it, that message was not heard by these boys. Perhaps it was lost in the noise of all the other messages that were implicitly being conveyed and received: that the school did not care about its students’ safety and did not want to hear about kids being victimized; that the school did not care about teaching anything interesting or relevant to their lives; and that the school did not, ultimately, respect who these students are and what they might have to offer to the society in which they live.

The Sphere of School and Society

This sphere, based upon the teachings of John Dewey (1944) travels beyond the immediate environs of the school, and into that larger society in which the school – and

school bullying – find themselves. Dewey described an iterative, interactive relationship between society (its values, habits and aims) and the education which it provides to its children – “[a]ny education given by a group tend to socialize its members, but the quality and value of the socialization depends upon the habits and aims of the group” (Dewey, 1944, p. 83). Under this notion, bullying within a school not only socializes the students, but might well be reflective of the “habits and aims” of the “group” or society providing the schooling.

This Dewey concept leads to the questions broached by this sphere: do the study participants believe that bullying is an element of the society in which they live – a part of human nature, inborn in all of us, inescapable – or, instead, something that could be affected, changed, or overcome through intervening actions taken in a school setting? Or, to put a different spin on it, does what goes on in society at large irrevocably dictate how bullying unfolds in a school setting? And what might be the impacts of school bullying on the society at large?

The participants in this study seem to agree that bullying is inevitable in the school setting. To Benny, “that’s how kids are;” the point is “not really why [bullies] do it, but that they’re gonna do it.” Both Luis and Warren assert that it is “kids’ nature” to bully, and Luis concludes that “kids are kids, and they’re always going to be that way.” Sara and Luis both believe that there will “always” be kids who feel “superior” to or “cooler than” others, and that they will end up bullying the weaker ones. Because of this sense that bullying is just “gonna happen” regardless of what anyone does, the students react pessimistically when asked directly what they think schools could do to prevent bullying. Jeff suggest the taking of “drastic measures:” putting security everywhere

monitoring student behavior at all times; suspending, expelling, or otherwise “making an example” of bullies to get across the message that sure and swift consequences will ensue when bullies are caught; and “harsher rules, [and] harsher enforcement of rules.” But he does not believe that such measures could actually eliminate bullying altogether.

Where does that pessimistic sense that school bullying is just “going to happen,” that it is part of “kids’ nature,” come from? Luis believes that “school is a part of the world...it’s not a different element” and that “the world is corrupt, and it’s gotten more corrupt since I was growing up.” He describes bullying behavior that goes on in that world outside of school: principals vs. teachers in school, his mother vs. her supervisor at work, his stepfather hitting him when he was little. The other interviewees also proffer examples of bullying that they have seen in the lives of their parents, their teachers, in the workplace, even in the media (*e.g.*, Benny’s discussion of bullying as portrayed in “The Simpsons”). Sara observes that if “your dad or mother is abusive to you, you’re probably going to take that out on someone else because you think that’s what people do.” Dick describes how bullying taking place between Riverdale staff members, or between principals and teachers/staff at schools, spreads down to the students in their charge and triggers bullying behavior between students up and down the “social ladder” – and he likens it to “a virus,” presumably because it spreads from adult to child so easily, as if a contagion itself. Benny senses that, if you are a bully, “somewhere you’ve been bullied, whether it starts at home...from parents, like parents messing with each other, bullying other parents.” He concludes that “I don’t really think bullying is just automatic. I think it’s learned.” Benny also notes that, once you learn how to bully, “it progresses with you,

like, you learn it, you carry it through high school, and you kind of keep that trait...through your older, your adult life. It kind of continues on.”

It is a learning cycle that continues, it seems to these kids, without end. Children learn how to bully from adults. They carry that “trait” with them into adulthood – where, presumably, they will have contact with children and, through the model of their own behavior, will pass that trait on to the young. And there is fertile soil from which this trait can continue to evolve, because there will always be someone “superior,” someone “cooler” on one side, and someone “weaker,” “lower down the food chain” or the “social ladder,” on the other. Given the combination of the bullying learning cycle and the accompanying power inequities, Luis reaches the conclusion that the only way bullying could be prevented altogether would be “if everyone was equal,” because “if everyone knew that they were equal, and wasn’t better than no one else, maybe there wouldn’t be no reason to pick on the next man lower [on] the totem pole.” But he concedes that this is unrealistic, that it is not going to happen.

But what, really, is inevitable here? Is it the bullying – or is it the inequality, the power discrepancies between weak and strong, superior and subordinate, which learned bullying tendencies can easily exploit? The Riverdale boys seldom had helpful adults in their lives, positive models of non-bullying behavior from which to learn. They recall seeing in school (and sometimes seeing at Riverdale) power being used by adults in bullying ways, rather than in helping or leadership-driven ways. To the extent that they did feel helped or mentored by others at school, it was not always in ways conducive to positive outcomes: Jeff being watched after by his original gangleader, Benny being succored by “the wrong crowd.” The Liston kids had a different experience. Sara talks

about adults in her own life who modeled positive, helping rather than hurtful behavior for her – her mother, her band leader, her English teacher, her counselor. And Warren, the only one of the interviewees who did not profess to seeing bullying behaviors among the adults around him, had the model of military leadership: where instead of the stronger people (generally, the officers) bullying their subordinates, they act as “leaders” them instead. That “leading” involves constructive “correction” of others rather than “pushing them around.”

The question becomes whether those who are “higher” or “stronger” or more powerful than some other people might use that strength to help – to teach, to mentor, to lead – rather than to bully. Can adults in schools model that kind of positive behavior for their students, and might those students be able to learn a non-bullying way to act? Benny believes that a bullying response to differentials in power is “learned” rather than “automatic.” Perhaps the cycle of learning bullying behavior could, indeed, be broken.

The Sphere of Private and Public Concerns

This cycle of learning and then modeling bullying behavior in the school setting appears to have been alive and well for the participants interviewed here, especially for the Riverdale boys. For these young men, their teachers and school staff were often not the positive role models that they might have liked to have. Moreover, they routinely did not intervene to stop the bullying that these kids suffered while it happened (see Mishna, 2004). Dick and Jeff express the belief that the teachers/staff were often aware (or should have been aware) of what was going on, that they, as the responsible adults in the school setting, should have stepped in to protect the victims from their tormentors, and that they

should have stood up for the victims afterwards – but they did not. The teachers could have stopped the bullying cycle. They should have. Why didn't they?

One possible interpretation or explanation – supported by what these kids actually said about their bullying experiences and the teachers' actions both during and afterwards – arises from the confusion within the school as to its proper role and function within the legalistic no man's land between what is private and what is public.¹⁴ School bullying is often seen as occurring as part of an interpersonal relationship between two children – a private relationship into which public school personnel, as agents of the state, is historically loathe to intervene. Yet the expansion of the consequences of bullying from the stuff of private relations into the cataclysms of public, criminal conflagrations – Columbine shootings, school suicides, etc. – has placed the schools in an unenviable awkward position. They do not want to intervene too soon – what would be the consequences be if they misinterpreted an innocent spat or “playing around” between two students? – but they do not want to wait until it is too late – who wants to be blamed for ignoring persistent bullying when it results in some kind of rampage?

School ambivalence as to how to approach dealing with bullying, in general, and actually bullying incidents that occur between students, in particular, comes through loudly and clearly in the words of the victims of bullying interviewed here. Schools attempt to show their recognition of the seriousness of bullying as a school problem, to demonstrate to their students and to the community that bullying is a matter of public

¹⁴ Historically, the U.S. legal system has recognized a broad “difference between the law of the state and the internal, privately determined regulation of private associations” and relationships (Unger, 1976, p. 201). Purely private behavior within personal relationships generally does not constitute a legitimate reason for the government to intervene – unless one side inflicts upon the other a harm that rises to the level of (a) a civil wrong or “tort,” such that the legal system is willing to shift the damages therefrom to the person who caused the harm; or (b) a crime, not just against the harmed private part, but against the public at large (Rabin, 1976).

concern and is being addressed. The manner in which they do so, however -- with “lame” and “ridiculous” anti-bullying programs that are “a bunch of crap” – is seen by the students as wholly ineffective.

When push comes to shove – when the bullying actually happens – the students feel that school personnel are AWOL on the job. Serious stuff happens between kids, and it is ignored. If a student does bring a bullying incident to the attention of the authorities, as Luis and Dick all said, more often than not that reporting student is the one who suffers. He is the one who has to “testify,” who has to find corroborating “witnesses,” who has to provide “proof” just as if he were “in court.” If he cannot do so, then it seems that he could be punished for “lying;” under those circumstances, who would ever come forward and enlist the aid of the authorities? Those authorities are felt to ignore the bullying unless and until it becomes so serious that of overt physical violence ensue. At that point, the bullying enters the proper sphere for public intervention – after all, crime-like behavior is involved – and school personnel seem to feel more comfortable intervening.

As a result, any intervention is forestalled unless and until the bullying evolves to the point of visible, unambiguously violent or criminal behavior – at which point, at least for these Riverdale boys, it may be the victim reaching the breaking point and lashing physically back at the original perpetrators, who may in the first instance have bullied using words or behavior appearing to observers to be otherwise innocuous. But it is that victim who, ultimately, is punished by the authorities. As Dick observes, the school people in charge “weren’t really even doing anything... [They] didn’t really care... They just kept telling us to deal with it... It’s getting old, so. Lot of us just started fighting.

Can't stand getting bullied anymore." Jeff feels that "there was a lot of times [staff] could have stepped in" when "they'd see someone talking smack to me," and now wishes that they had; but instead, "the only time they'd intervene [was] when they'd see me swing on someone." The victim is, in a sense, betrayed a second time: first, by the bullies who use their power to demean him, and second, by the authorities who stand idly by while he was bullied, and then come down upon him only when he feels he has no choice but to take matters into his own hands.

Where are the teachers in all this? They appear to be confused as to when they should take steps to do something about bullying (Mishna, 2004). There is clearly an expectation on the part of some of those interviewed – Sara, Dick, Luis, Jeff – that their teachers should have been watching more closely, that they should have seen the bullying happening and done something to stop it at an earlier stage. There is a pervasive sense of lack of support, bordering on betrayal, by the adults in charge because they did not do so. The teachers, however, were themselves between a rock and a hard place. It can be very difficult for teachers to distinguish between behavior between two children that may be bullying, or may be just "playing around." Teachers appear to be confused about what is bullying, and what is not (Mishna, 2004). For Jeff, bullies "talking smack" to him was not seen as "bullying" enough for the teachers to intervene, but rather as a signal to bring in "some staff" because "Jeff is about to fight with this kid." Dick thinks that the teachers see most bullying behavior as "just little kids acting [like] little kids" or just "playing around." Sara asserts that, in elementary school, teachers often ignored bullying as "all being fun and jokes and stuff," and in high school, persistent verbal bullying is ignored because that teacher "thinks it's debating while it's really not." Also, as many of

the students report, bullies are very “smart” about making sure that bullying occurs “behind teachers’ back” or in places (bathrooms, hallways, playgrounds) where teachers are not watching (Olweus, 1995, p. 25). Since victims are reluctant to report being bullied – because they do not want the repercussions of being called “snitches” and because they do not trust that they will be believed – teachers often may not even know that the bullying is happening (see Mishna & Alaggia, 2005).

We are left with a conundrum that is not easily resolved: victims of bullying seem deeply to want and expect teachers or school staff to intervene in bullying before kids really get hurt, and especially before the victims feel the need to take matters into their own hands; but the types of tools (discrete anti-bullying programs) and support (from administration, parents, and even from students) that teachers have at their disposal do not easily lend themselves to effective early interventions. The impact that the failure to intervene has on these student victims – in terms of their perceptions that the adults who wield the power in their world of school do not care and cannot be trusted – is significant, to be sure.

* * *

What does the above Interpretation – this breaking down of the study participants’ experiences into the three contextual Spheres of School (through the Eisner ecological dimensions), School and Society (from the Dewey perspective), and Private vs. Public concern (through a legalistic lens) – add to our understanding of those experiences?

The parsing of the data through these three Spheres reveals a myriad of interconnected ways in which schools serve both to help bullied students remain involved in their schoolwork and hopeful about their futures – and to impede such involvement. It

demonstrates that, where schools persistently fail to offer such help, the bullied students may carry the burden of their bullying into adulthood, begetting a societal cycle of learning bullying behavior that, arguably, could have been forestalled through effective intervention at the school level. And it affords insight into the role played by the ambiguous private/public nature of the bullying relationship in why intervening assistance to bullied students in need may not be effectively occurring..

Evaluation: What Helped and What Hurt?

Drawing from the portraits of the eight young people, and the analysis of that data through the three contextual spheres contained in the Description and Interpretation sections above, respectively, this section now hones in on an evaluative question in two parts: what have we heard from these study participants about their school experiences that

- a) Helped them to cope with being bullied and to thrive?
- b) Impeded such coping and thriving?

What Helped?

Two elements of some or all of these participants' school experiences appeared to have helped them through their being bullied, if and where those elements were indeed present: (a) school-generated challenges; and (b) caring adult role models.

Challenges

One bulwark against bullying's ill effects appears to have been schoolwork that provided a challenge, or extra-curricular but school-based activities in which the student could become deeply engaged (see Furlong, 1991). Both Warren and Sara repeatedly cite

to their interest in and excitement for their academic work, and their participation in musical and athletic activities. Benny and Dick seemed better able to deal with the bullying inflicted upon them in elementary school, because at least within the classroom they were able to immerse themselves in engaging and interesting work provided by attentive teachers focused on their particular needs.

The attentiveness to particular student needs and the fostering of student interests may have been key. Part of why the work or school-based activities presented a challenge is because teachers (through their attentiveness to individual students) and the school itself (where it supported the teachers through its organizational structure) managed to appreciate the levels at which these students were learning, and differentiate what was being taught so as to challenge the students at those levels. Dick, in elementary school special education class, found teachers willing to allow him to contribute to group projects according to his own particular talents in the arts and construction. Benny's third grade teacher was attentive to his needs as a gifted child and made sure he had special work to do. Warren speaks of his high school having many AP classes and a "strict curriculum" taught by "fantastic teachers" who "understand us." Sara got to middle school and found, for the first time, that teachers acknowledged that she learned at a faster pace, and put her into advanced classes or groupings (an approach that was permitted if not supported by the school structure itself). A teacher also took Sara and her 6th grade class to choose musical instruments, and she discovered the bassoon: it proved to be an important discovery, in that it eventually evolved into her current path towards a college major in the performing arts.

These challenges provided by and through school kept kids going to school even in the face of being bullied. That they were provided at all may be inextricably interconnected with the second helping element – caring adults.

Caring Adults as Supporters and Role Models

In talking about how they survived being bullied in the school environment (when, indeed, they did attend school), the interviewees tend to cite to specific adults within the school who paid attention to them, somehow provided them sustenance, or acted in ways that they admired. Luis speaks of the elementary school teacher for whom he went to school, because he wanted to “do good” to please her. Dick warmly describes sustaining relationships with his special ed teacher, his principal, and his janitor – how attentive they were to his needs and feelings – and what a loss he felt when they no longer were in his life at school. During the times in which Luis and Dick had these supportive teachers and staff in their school lives, they report having regularly attended school, even in the face of being bullied; once in middle school, when their access to such adults appears to have ebbed, they ditched with more frequency.

Meanwhile, Sara and Warren relate having experienced that kind of support from responsible adults in school even once middle and high school were reached. Sara keeps hearkening back to her reverence for her high school English teacher, and was touched by the support given by her middle school counselor after she had been sexually harassed. (Indeed, when Sara and Warren were bullied in or around school, they both were able to obtain adult support from teachers and/or staff, either through direct intervention (getting Sara’s sexual harasser suspended, or kicking Warren’s bully off the school bus) or indirect succor (creating an English class in which Sara could “lose herself,” or providing

group project opportunities through which Warren might escape being excluded)). And Warren, in musing upon his still inchoate future career plans, speaks fondly of his civics teacher who used to be in foreign intelligence, and wonders whether following a similar path might be for him.

* * *

What did this combination of challenging work and a supportive adult presence do for these students? It seems to have fostered a more attractive school environment for them (for Warren and Sara, up through high school, and for Benny, Luis and Dick, while it lasted in elementary school): a welcoming place where a child could feel known and appreciated for who he or she really was, find a refuge from being picked on, and (in Sara's and Warren's case) enjoy a space in which to ponder what his/her future might hold.

What Hurt?

Or, to put it differently, what may have impeded the development of a positive school environment of the sort that might have helped these bullied students do well despite being bullied?

School Structural Change

Looming large was the structural, organizational change occurring in school as students transitioned from the elementary to the middle school level (Espelage & Swearer, 2003, p. 192). As discussed earlier, no longer were students assigned to a discrete classroom with a single teacher. Now they would go from class to class, teacher to teacher. Class size significantly increased, and pedagogy changed from interactive to lecture-driven. Students now were responsible both for taking notes and keeping track of

their own work, with little help from teachers focused on their own subject-matter areas but not on the progress of the whole child. Gone was the offering of school work that might challenge each child and his particular talents (at least insofar as the boys who ended up in Riverdale were concerned); given the logistical dictates of class size, school work became less differentiated, less interactive, less focused on individual student needs -- both harder ("like college" in its lack of adult supervision) and more boring at the same time. It also impeded the development of relationships between students and any of the adults in school, in that there were simply too many students "to look after." As Dick observes, "the farther I got through school, the farther I got pushed away from staff."

Adult Non-Intervention

Not unrelated to these structural issues and their consequences was the failure of teachers or other responsible school adults to intervene (or to assist or support the victims) when bullying occurred (Mishna, 2004). For Benny, the fact that bullying occurred unrestrained by the actions of teachers and staff beset by too many students caused him not to seek out challenging work from his teachers even though he probably could have; it became too painful to go through the repetitive gauntlet of ridicule, much easier just to ditch. Most of the Riverdale boys at one point or another express the feeling that responsible adults at school simply did not watch closely enough to intervene in bullying as it happened – that they were dismissive of it as an inevitable part of school life and did not take it seriously. And the boys agree on one thing – those teachers should have watched. They could have, and should have intervened. That these adults did not take such steps contributed to the boys' pervasive feeling that the adults did not care (and they should have cared). They were just "in it for the paycheck."

The boys do concede that the “smartness” of the bullies in figuring out how to effectuate school bullying in places and at times where teachers could not see it (exacerbated by the middle school structure) may have made it harder for the teachers to take steps to intervene – how could they intervene, when they did not know it was happening?. But the young men express frustration at the school-created barriers to victims’ actually reporting bullying to a teacher so that he or she might know enough to intervene; the need to provide “proof,” and the overhanging threat that, without it, the reporting victim might himself get punished for “lying,” led to a palpable sense that “telling” was not an option. The boys conveyed the strong sentiment, given how difficult their peers already made it to report a bullying incident – how likely it was that they would receive the “snitch” label from their fellow students and be more severely harassed – that “telling” should not have been so fraught with the risk of being disbelieved from the adult side. The conviction comes across clearly from these boys’ words that, as victims of bullying, they absolutely should have been believed by the adults charged with their safety. That the adults would not go the extra mile to trust what a victim said about being bullied – after their already clear failure to watch for and intervene in bullying as it happened – stunted the growth of any relationship of mutual trust or caring between teachers and student.

And even if teachers had wanted to help – even if they had the best of intentions to do so – the lack of both personal and professional support from their principals who would not back them up, and school policies imposing legalistic requirements of corroborating witnesses and the like – created a huge obstacle to their doing so.

Isolation – from Community and from Future

All of the above contributed to a feeling of isolation within the school environment for these boys. As noted earlier, bullying by its very nature was an isolating experience (B. K. Ladd & Ladd, 2001, pp. 38-39). Victims believed that they had to “handle it on their own,” often feeling too embarrassed to share their bullying burden with others. And the adult reaction (or non-reaction) to bullying as it happened only served to increase the isolating impact. The school did little or nothing for these kids to alleviate this feeling of having to go it alone; it provided no sense of safety, no offer of protection or refuge from the verbal and/or physical attacks being received from their peers.

For Warren and Sara, school did provide such protection and refuge: both by intervening to remove bullies from the bus or from school, and by offering engaging academics and activities that could serve as an alternative to bully-generated alienation. But school did not proffer that kind of meaningful support to the Riverdale boys. As a result, some of these young men felt driven to take matters into their own hands – and then suffered the consequences of suspensions or expulsions (the ultimate isolation from the community of school) when they, rather than their tormentors, got caught.

These boys were not about passively to accept being isolated and be done with it. They managed to fashion their own alternative methods of mitigating their school-sanctioned isolation. They found other communities of support (*e.g.*, Jeff’s gang membership, Luis’s cousins, Benny’s “wrong crowd”) and other engaging activities (*e.g.*, making money through illicit means such as selling drugs or providing protection for kids

getting “punked,” doing gang recruitment, getting into fights). Needless to say, these alternatives were not school-sponsored

These boys also grew increasingly walled off from the future consequences of their actions by their single-minded focus upon their immediate, non-school-oriented lives. They were consumed by friends and fighting, drugs and ditching school. They focused on coping with the present, rather than what might be good for them “in the long run.” They were fundamentally not “thinking about [their] future” at all. School was something to be ditched so they could take care of the present business at hand, not something to be attended and completed in order to connect with a future holding greater promise.

* * *

At this point, it is time to return to a concept initially introduced in the Interpretation Section above, that of the societal cycle of learning bullying behavior. As part of that cycle, students learn about bullying as school children from the adults in their schools and in their lives, carry that trait with them into their own adulthood, and then, as adults, model it for the children in their charge. This Evaluation Section looked more closely into what schools did for (or to) our study participants either to alleviate or exacerbate the impacts of bullying upon them. Viewed through the lens of our “School and Society” sphere, this Section could be said to be all about what the schools did to interrupt the bullying learning cycle versus what they may have done to keep it going.

In the Thematics Section to follow, it will be argued that, for the bullying learning cycle truly to be aborted – so that the preferred method of handling power discrepancies in our society might move from the realm of abusive to that of helping or leading – the

school setting is, indeed, the place to start. That school setting must also be a place which bullied children feel to be welcoming and meaningful for them – because without continued school attendance, the likelihood of a positive outcome for them (for example, high school graduation/college rather than jail) clearly recedes. To pursue these points, the section will focus on three themes that surfaced from the words of our interview participants – all revolving around things that kids need and that schools might provide.

Thematics: Three Things Kids Need

From the above Description, Interpretation, and Evaluation gleaned from the transcripts of interviews with the eight participants from Liston High and Riverdale Academy, an understanding of three fundamental needs, possessed by the young people who have been bullied while attending our schools emerge: first, they need a place of refuge and belonging; second, they need adults who know them, care for them, and whom they respect; and third, they need a sense that a positive future awaits them if and when they finish school. Either the schools do what is in their power to satisfy these needs – or these kids who have already suffered from bullying by their peers, suffer the consequences of the schools' inadequacy as well.

Kids Need a Place of Refuge

Bullied kids feel isolated. To thrive, these kids need to be able to overcome that debilitating sense of isolation. They need a place to belong – a sense of community – a place of refuge where they can feel safe, protected, appreciated for who they are, and looked after.¹⁵

¹⁵ The need of a child – or any person – for a sense of identity, recognition, belonging, and community – in order to attain happiness, in any real sense, is discussed at length in the literature (Noddings, 2003). Noddings (pp. 220-239) believes that school can play an important role in helping to satisfy children's

Warren found this, in the face of being excluded as the “new kid” and bullied for his cleft palate, by seeking out kids who were like him – with the intercession of watchful teachers – and by being embraced by the small expatriate community in and around school who saw to it that the bully was kicked off the bus.

Sara found this, in the face of rumor-mongering by supposed friends and sexual harassment, by losing herself in her very challenging studies, by throwing herself into band and thereby making new friends, and by having an understanding counselor who fixed the flaw in her community by removing the offending harasser.

Jeff found this, in the face of being bullied, by joining a gang when he was 8.

And even though that gang led to his getting shot in the head at age 10, it became a true place of refuge for him, where more powerful people watched after him and, in their own way, cared for him, and where he, when he became more powerful, could watch after and nurture others. Benny and James found the same sense of community, refuge, and belonging with the “wrong crowd,” or with weed-smoking friends; Luis and Sean found it with cousins or friends who would fight on their behalf.

What the Riverdale boys all seem to have in common is that, by the time either late elementary school and definitely middle and high school rolled around, that sense of refuge, protection, and belonging simply was not available from their schools. School work was boring, the halls were not safe, the adults did not care. So, these boys were driven to look elsewhere – to people and places that did not, ultimately propel them towards positive outcome in their lives. School could have, and should have given them that place of refuge and belonging, as it did for Warren and Sara. But it did not.

longing for community, and that if that type of longing is not addressed by school or home, children will find other, less wholesome vehicles for doing so; she cites the joining of gangs and cults as an example.

Kids Need Adults

Bullied kids feel powerless. The people with power in the schools – other than the bullies themselves) are the responsible adults: the teachers, the administration, and the staff. Bullied kids look to those adults for support and sustenance far more than we might otherwise assume.

The interviewees unite in their conviction that the behavior of the adults at school matters, they needed the adults to pay attention both to the bullying inflicted upon them, and to each of them as individuals as well. The study participants speak warmly about the positive adult relationships which they had in school: Luis and the elementary school teacher for whom he wanted to “do good,” Benny and the 4th grade teacher who plied him with additional, challenging work, Dick and the elementary school principal and janitor who cared enough to talk to him about his day, Sara and Warren and the middle school teachers/staff who helped with their harassment and exclusion and the high school teachers who encouraged their academic and extracurricular interests. And their negative appraisal of teachers who should have watched, should have known that their students were being bullied, and should have done something about it – but did not – is just as sharp and clear. The level of disappointment with and disapprobation for teachers who acted in ways that were unsupportive of their students in times of need is palpable: Dick is still incredulous that his teachers mistook his being bullied for “playing around;” Jeff scoffs at teachers who, instead of intervening in the “talking smack” that caused him pain, gathered staff around to deal only with his inevitable “swinging back” at his tormenter. The kids have a strong sense about how the adults ought to be have been

helping them, an appreciation for when they did, and a frustrated disdain for when they did not.

The behavior of adults in school serves as a model for students to emulate: a good model where the behavior is appropriate, respectful, caring and supportive of those who may be less powerful and more vulnerable (that is, the children in their charge), a questionable model where the behavior turns out to be otherwise (see McEvoy, 2005). This is especially the case when that behavior acts out bullying relationships among the school adults. Dick eloquently describes the trickling down of abusive conduct from the principal, to the teachers, to the school cops, to the students higher “on the social ladder,” to those lower down, as “like a virus.” It’s catching, and, once caught, the tendency to bully becomes a persistent behavioral “trait,” as Benny characterizes it, one that a child has seen in and learned from the adults around him, then carries with him into adulthood.

Kids need adults from whom they will not catch this virus. They need adults who model behavior towards those less powerful than themselves that is helping, mentoring, leading, teaching – but not bullying. Schools could help to fill this need: through teachers and staff who pay enough attention to the relationships between and among their students, that they might wade into the uncertain waters of what is bullying and what is not and actually intervene when bullying is happening. Of course, for this to occur, the school administration would have to support teachers in their decisions so to wade in – and the community would have to support the school in taking that kind of stand. And students would have to learn to trust that they will be believed, rather than put to their proof and/or punished, for reporting bullying incidents, so that the likelihood that adults in the school setting will learn about out-of-sight bullying might increase.

Teachers could be positive role models for kids. Kids want that. And the Riverdale boys, possibly inspired by the examples of some of the Riverdale staff, describe how they want to be positive role models themselves, to help rather than abuse those more vulnerable than themselves – their daughters, younger siblings, frail and aging family members, young people out their susceptibility to the importuning of gangs. The societal cycle of learning bullying can, perhaps, be averted. A school setting may be the place for that to start.

Warren’s words bring insight. He speaks of bullying being part of “kids’ nature,” and likens their behavior to that of dogs, the stronger of whom abuse the weaker as a matter of course. But he also talks of the adults in his world who exercise “leadership” rather than abuse in their relationships with those less powerful than themselves. Perhaps we can hope that we are better than dogs, and that our school personnel, teaching young people rather than canines, might lead by example and thereby begin to eradicate the viral cycle of abuse.

Kids Need a Sense of Future

Bullied kids focus on the dangers that immediately surround them. For example, Jeff talks of how he could not pay attention to school work in the classroom, because all his energy was devoted towards figuring out how to avoid his abusers once the class ended. If school is fraught with that kind of danger, what could possibly keep a kid going to school in the face of it?

One possibility is the sense that something awaits him or her after finishing school – something that might help make it worthwhile to attend, rather than to ditch. Warren and Sara both wax at length about a future firmly in their minds – college – for

which continuing in school was clearly a necessity. For the study participants from Riverdale, however, the consistent theme was their coping with the present, and their lack of concern at the time for the future consequences of their consistent failure to show up for school. Nothing that happened at school effectively communicated to them the message that their futures could be brighter if they stayed around for that diploma.

It could be argued that the message of the desirability of continued school attendance in order to attain a better life thereafter was probably transmitted to Warren and Sara through their relatively affluent home lives, as much as through their school experience – and there is undoubtedly some truth to that. Some of the Riverdale young men probably did not receive that same message coming from home about the advantages of school attendance over ditching and how that might implicate potential future plans.

But what does that say about our schools, if it is assumed that the message of good things coming in the future from school attendance in the present can only be heard from home, and not from the school itself? Isn't this, at bottom, the school's message to convey? Could it be too much to expect from the school that it take meaningful steps to communicate to children *not* just their present value as test-takers (to make teachers "look good for the principal," as Dick observes) but also the future worth that they might bring to and obtain from the outside world once the goal of graduation has been attained?

Because if, especially for the bullied child, the school (a) contains no adult who cares about him or for him; (b) is not safe for him; (c) is neither challenging nor engaging to him; and (d) does not even provide a glimmer of a promise for a positive future for him – then why on earth would or even should that child consider going to school on any given day? He has a choice, you know. And if he cannot find a good reason to bring

himself to go to school, how will he ever go on to overcome the negative impact of that childhood bullying on his life?

Schools can be a place where kids find both safety and challenge; a sense of belonging and a sense of being supported by adults whom they respect and whose example they yearn to follow; and a hopeful yet realistic vision of future to which a high school diploma (and the non-ditching that leads up to it) might well contribute. A need for all these things has been voiced by the students participating in this study. It behooves our schools to figure out how such needs might be met – both so that children who are bullied now might nonetheless achieve school success and so that the societal cycle of learned bullying might have a chance of being stopped for future generations.

Directions for Further Research

Based upon some of the limitations of this Study 2 in the implementation of its design, as well as some of the thematic conclusions reached in the analysis of the data, the following further research areas could be profitably explored:

Expand Upon Population Samples from Current Study

In the instant study, two limitations arose, one inherent to the design, and one during implementation. First, the demographics of the “successful” population and the “unsuccessful” population were starkly different: the former was all white, mixed gender, upper-middle class; the latter covered many races and ethnic groups, was all male, and probably of lower socio-economic status (although the economic status of either group was not formally recorded). Second, only two participants from the “successful” sample were actually interviewed. It would be interesting and informative to replicate this study with a “successful” population with similar racial/ethnic and economic demographics to

that of the incarcerated young men – that is, high-achieving students from a racially/ethnically and economically diverse school, especially one with a large at-risk population. It would also be helpful to expand the study to incarcerated young women who had been bullied as well. In this way, more might be learned as to whether the themes arising from this research were unduly influenced by the demographic differences between the two sampled groups.

Conduct Quantitative Studies Using the Three Needs.

Early on, in its review of the short-term longitudinal studies exploring the impact of factors mediating between bullying, on the one hand, and school outcomes, on the other, this study raised the question of whether the mediating factors selected by those researchers were indeed meaningful ones, robust enough to account for the variance in the outcomes shown. A next step after this study might be to take the three thematic needs of kids – for caring adults, for a place of refuge, and for a sense of future – and find or create quantitative instruments through which they might be measured as mediating factors.¹⁶

Controlling for School Factors, Does Bullying Make a Difference?

We have learned from the study participants that whether their schools helped in meeting these three needs did seem to make a difference in their thriving in school and in life. It must be asked whether the fact that they were bullied did, indeed, play a role in their outcomes – or whether the more important factor in the school setting dictating positive or negative outcomes for these youths was how they were treated by their

¹⁶ At present, this researcher is participating in a study being conducted under a grant from the federal government looking at, among other things, “school engagement” as a mediating factor between victimization and school outcomes such as attendance and achievement. The school engagement instrument being used contains items that possibly address each of the three needs.

schools generally. A retrospective study could be designed that compares the outcomes for a sample of young people that had been bullied and those that had not, somehow holding constant their treatment by their schools along the dimensions of the three needs. The nuts and bolts of how such a study might be designed and implemented would be interesting to explore.

Exploring the Views of School Staff on Bullying.

This study has attended to the voices of students who have experienced bullying and the schools actions in response thereto. The importance of the role of school staff in dealing with the victims of bullying has emerged; the voices of those staff members – the teachers, the custodians, the resources officers, the administration – however, are missing here. Data should be collected about how school personnel view and experience bullying within the schools. How do they generally address it, both during bullying incidents and in their aftermath? What has helped them in dealing with school bullying, what has gotten in their way? And, overall, what do they perceive the proper role of school to be with regard to bullying in the school setting?¹⁷

What this study reveals is, at bottom, that the proper role of school with regard to bullying is unsettled. The kids do not know what that role should be. The schools do not know it either. What is clear, however, is that there may be much that the schools can do to help victims of bullying overcome its pain and stigma to be successful students and have productive futures. It is a worthy aim to be explored.

¹⁷ While some initial quantitative work has been done in this area (see Espelage & Swearer, 2004, pp. 121-139), a qualitative perspective, in which teachers and school staff might candidly describe their experience of and ambivalence with the ambiguities of bullying would definitely enhance the understanding in the field.

Chapter Four – Study 3

Coda: What Teachers Have to Say About Bullying and What to Do About It

At this juncture, it is helpful to recapitulate what has been gleaned from research previously undertaken and from the research conducted for this report. A review of the literature on bullying and peer victimization revealed the importance of looking closely at the factors that mediate between victimization, on the one hand, and positive and negative outcomes, on the other. Our conversations with truant young people (See Appendix B) showed that bullying at school may have played some kind of role in their declining, repeatedly, to stay away from school. That led us to explore, in our central quantitative study, the direct and indirect linkages between being bullied in school and school attendance, as well as school achievement, with 1,000 diverse sixth graders. That data demonstrated minimal direct statistical connections between victimization and truancy; it did show, however, that school engagement does operate as a statistically significant mediating factor between being a victim and both school attendance and school achievement. In other words, bullied students being emotionally, cognitively, and/or behaviorally engaged in what is going on in their classroom and school building may make a difference in whether they continue to attend and do well in school despite their being victimized.

The qualitative study of both incarcerated and high achieving youth who had been bullied in grade school delved further into what goes into a bullied child becoming engaged or turned off by the school setting. There, we learned, among other things, that an important element of a victim's staying engaged in school is the active presence of

caring, responsible adults in classrooms, halls, cafeterias, and playgrounds – wherever student life unfolds. Obviously, that includes teachers.

Recent research has pointed out the centrality of the teacher's attitudes and conduct in a child's being able to overcome the potential negative impacts of bullying on his or her life (Beran, 2009 (victimized adolescents receive little support from teachers); Bradshaw, 2007 (school staff underestimates the extent of bullying); Crothers & Kolbert, 2008 (teachers' classroom behavior management is important in addressing bullying); Davidson & Demaray, 2007 (teacher support moderates the relationship between victimization and internalizing distress from bullying); Ellis et al., 2007 (teachers' perception of the seriousness of bullying may not be consistent with its impact on students); Hamarus & Kaikkonen, 2008 (bullying behavior is often hidden from teachers); James et al., 2008 (teachers' role in modeling behavior is important for bullies and victims); Marachi & Benbenishty, 2007 (higher levels of teacher support is associated with lower victimization rates); Nation et al., 2008 (students disempowered by teachers may become victims); Salmivalli & Voeten, 2004 (teachers' tolerance/intolerance of bullying is a more powerful regulator of student behavior than peer group norms)).

Up to this point in this report, the focus for data collection and analysis has been largely on student victims of bullying. Before closing, this study briefly detours for a foray into the world of teachers, and their observations and opinions about bullying in the school setting, and what schools might do to mitigate or exacerbate its effects.

The Setting

In the fall of 2008, one of the authors of this study taught a one-day, one-credit graduate seminar at the University of Denver, Morgridge College of Education. The topic was Bullying and Qualitative Research. (See Appendix F) The 15 students were either masters or doctoral students in Curriculum & Instruction. More importantly, they were all classroom teachers, at various grade levels, in the state of Colorado. As a pre-class assignment, each student was asked to write a one page reflection paper on a bullying incident that they had either (a) experienced when they were in grade school or (b) witnessed in their own classroom or school as a teacher. The seminar session began with students introducing themselves, describing a favorite or hated teacher they had had as grade schoolers, and talking about the bullying incident described in their reflection papers. That set the stage – grounded firmly in the graduate students’ own experience – for the rest of the seminar, consisting of (a) lectures summarizing the research literature on bullying and victimization, most particularly focusing on the qualitative research done in the field, as well as various approaches and practices used to address school bullying (*e.g.*, Olweus, restorative justice, etc.), and (b) break out groups and workshop activities throughout the day allowing the students to work in small groups to process what they had heard. Their final course assignment was to write a five to seven page paper recounting either (a) a research design for further exploration of bullying issues, or (b) an approach for addressing bullying in the school setting.

The “data” for this section of the report is gleaned from the papers written by the graduate student/teachers for this seminar.¹⁸ The papers have been treated as if they

¹⁸ Permission to use these papers for this purpose was obtained, via email, from 11 of the 15 seminar participants. Some of them asked that their names not be associated with any specific comment, and

were focus group transcripts: they were reviewed numerous times and coded for themes,¹⁹ and those themes were then analyzed and integrated into the discussion that follows.

The Teachers' Themes

The Foundation of and Necessary Precondition for Bullying in Schools: Power Inequities

Virtually all of the teachers' papers focus upon the inequities of power underlying the bullying relationships between students in their schools. They recite the third leg of the standard, three-part bullying definition, and assert that there must be "an imbalance of power, with a more powerful person or group attacking a less powerful one" (Nansel et al., p. 2094). But they go deeper than that, into their own observations of student behavior, and more broadly, into conditions in the outside world fueling the power imbalances that then make their way into the school/student setting.

A middle school teacher notes that "one of the characteristics of bullying behavior that continues to permeate my mind is the imbalance of power between the person choosing to bully and the target." She goes on to observe:

I have noticed that my students are very comfortable with the environment in which they live because they know nothing else. They have developed this notion of who "has the power" and have continued to act on it because no one has told

accordingly, the views and quotes taken from the papers are not here attributed to particular individuals. All eleven agreed, however, that they could be acknowledged by name for their valuable contributions to this research. The twelve are: Melissa Backlund, Megan France, Karyn Guilford, Jennie Hornbeck, Bruce Kerry, Kathryn Kubala, Danielle MacNeal, Mike McCord, William Riddle, Alex Sabot, and Abel Varney. We profoundly thank them for their thoughtful contribution to this project.

¹⁹ The codes that emerged from and were used to analyze the papers were, in alphabetical order: Accountability (A), Administration (Adm), "Bullying in a Box" (BB), Caring (Ca), Challenge (Ch), Civil Rights (Cr), Community (Com), Community Service (CS), Connectedness (Con), Definition (D), Diversity (Div), Family (F), Forms of Bullying (FB), Human Nature (HN), Individualization (I), Modeling Behavior (MB), No Tolerance Policies (NT), Outside World (OW), Power (P), Power vs. Community (PvC), Prevention (Pr), Responsibility (Resp), Restorative Justice (RJ), Rules (Ru), Survival (S), Supervision (Sup), Teacher Relationships (TR), and Teacher Training (TT).

them or shown them otherwise.

In this teacher's view, students accept the differences in power among their peers (their notion of "who has the power"), find comfort in that, because it is all they know, and then act upon that, through bullying behavior towards the less powerful among them. Other teachers agree that the environment around the students fuels their bullying instincts and impulses:

Bullying is part of human nature. The struggle for power that breeds negative thoughts, words, or actions toward another individual is evident in almost any sector of human life, including places of business, homes, and schools.

For bullying to be prevented, another teacher concludes that the power imbalances have to be corrected: "A balance of power and attitudes must be obtained to provide a structure of stability for a school and community to prevent bullying from occurring." But the all-pervasive nature of the struggle for power in "any sector of human life," makes it clear to one elementary school teacher that "bullying will never fully be stopped in our society," and therefore is virtually impossible to eliminate in our schools. A music teacher "agree[s] with those who think that it is impossible to completely prevent bullying in the schools." She believes that students need to

find something in their life at which they feel superior. When students do not have something in their lives that makes them feel good, I think they turn to more negative ways to feel that sense of power, like bullying, drugs, and/or gangs.

It is the imbalance of power between and among people --which students see played out before them in the outside world, and which they feel within them as they desperately seek a personal sense of power in their own lives -- that keeps the fires of bullying raging in our schools, and makes them so difficult to quench.

*What Aggravates Power Inequities, and Increases the Likelihood of Bullying:
Isolation*

When do students feel the disparities of power, and the urge to bully (or the vulnerability to being bullied) the most? The teachers agree that it is when students are alone and unsupported; the linkage between bullying and isolation pervades their papers. “It is in the lack of connection to community where children feel the need to struggle for power...to gain and exert power, the basis for bullying.” The easiest person to bully is “a lone individual that lacks support.” Bullying is “manifested in social rejection and isolation both in person and on the Internet.”

In one teacher’s view, “the increasingly culturally diverse environments of classrooms today” only exacerbate the potential for isolation. Because of this diversity, “a student who bullies need not look outside his classroom for a student who differs from the rest.” Such differences serve as a spur to isolate those who fail to fit in – who then, in their isolation and lack of support, appear weaker – and their victimization by the stronger and more powerful actors in the classroom environment becomes an easier, more natural thing to do.

*The Antidote to Problems of Power and Isolation:
Community*

A number of the teachers strongly assert that one way to ameliorate power inequities and combat the student isolation that aggravates bullying problems is to create a sense of community: connecting students with each other in the classroom, within the school, and to the larger community outside the school walls. One substitute teacher believes that

If students are disconnected from others they might be more likely to exhibit bullying behaviors. I believe that by making emotional connections with other

students, teachers, and community members a student will be less like[ly] to bully at all.

He thinks that “it is much harder to bully a tight-knit community that supports its people versus a lone individual that lacks any support.” If a student is being victimized “then it should not be that person’s problem, it should be the schools’ and communities’ problem to address.”

Another teacher similarly contends that “eliminating power struggle” can be achieved through “fostering a sense of community.” To that end, “children need to be educated on and feel a sense of community, and need to feel like they are a part of this community.” Teachers agree that this entails not only “establish[ing] a united community within a school,” but also “exposing our students to the surrounding community outside the classroom.” Within the school, “classroom management through human connection is essential to building a community to which all students can feel connected.” Beyond the school’s walls, “a school should seek to make connections within its surrounding communities and vice versa in order to allow students to develop interpersonal relationships and responsible citizenship.”

The teachers believe that the prevalence of bullying through power-wielding and isolation can be combated through this kind of community-building. An elementary school teacher feels “that the only effective way to lessen effects of bullying in school is to focus on...building a strong classroom community where all members are respected.”

Another feels that

We need to be teaching our children that every person in society has a place and responsibility in the community and when they do not follow through with their responsibilities, such as giving back to society through volunteer work, going to work each day, or simply holding a door for an old woman, the entire community

suffers.

These teachers, indeed, believe that a sense of community can and should be taught to their students. Students can “be taught...how to foster and be a member of a community, and how to take responsibility for themselves and for those around them.” Neither the bully nor the victim should be isolated and unsupported:²⁰ by teaching students to function as community members both within and outside of school, one teacher hopes that “the need to gain and exert power, the basis for bullying, would be all but eliminated.”

But how do you go about teaching and creating community in the school setting?

The task in schools as they exist today, as described by one teacher, is daunting:

It is nearly impossible to create a close community within a school when there are 2,000 students in the school at a time. Students struggle to find a sense of belonging in the school whether they have become merely a number in a sea of faces. When a student doesn't feel that they belong or have a purpose in the school, they will not feel responsibility to devote time and effort within the community. This is when students no longer attend class, antagonize other students, or sadly become the target of bullies themselves.

The outside world appears to be of little help: “How are children going to learn to be an active part of society when current citizens no longer feel a need to care for others, volunteer their time for others, and work together to create productive and caring community?” It seems that, in order to establish a sense of community within and outside of school, children need to be taught “to care” more than their adult counterparts currently do.

A Building Block for Community: Caring

²⁰ It should be noted that one of the teachers – and only one – believes that bullies *should* be isolated from others, banished to a sort of bullying “boot camp,” until they learn their lesson and are considered fit to return to the school setting. No one else in the graduate seminar shares this teacher's views.

The theme of “caring,” as the road to take to arrive at a sense of community that could lessen the likelihood of bullying, runs through a number of the teachers’ papers, relying on the work of Nel Noddings (1992) in support. One citer of Noddings believes “that if students care about themselves and their community they will be less likely to exhibit bullying behaviors.” Another asserts that she “strongly believe[s] that explicitly teaching my students to care will be the key to stopping their bullying behavior.” This novice teacher in a tough urban elementary school bemoans her observation that

what my students are missing is a sense of care for each other. Their survival instinct surpasses all, and this is understandable seeing as they come from family situations focused more on obtaining the basic necessities to live than on achieving deep personal connections and caring for one another.

She insists that “the ability of the next generation to sympathize and empathize will make or break this world.” She concedes that “power struggles are innately human and will exist as long as humans interact with one another,” yet she persists in advocating for caring, noting that “the goal of teaching care is to lessen the need for this struggle and thereby lessen the existing and damaging impact of bullying.” This teacher is pushing for

a different approach [towards bullying intervention] ... than the normal retribution and punishment seen in many schools... Care needs to literally pour from every corner such that it is a culture not only of the classroom but also of the school. Care needs to be explicitly modeled, talked about, and practiced. It is in setting the standard of empathy and sympathy that bullying can be lessened if not ideally eliminated, preparing our students to become successful citizens of future society.

But how does a teacher teach students to become caring members of their community – to care “about themselves, each other, the environment, and the world?”

Again citing Noddings (1992), another teacher notes that

as a teacher I think it would be part of my responsibility to provide those sorts of opportunities where my students can actively engage as both a person who cares for someone and as a person who is cared for.

What can a teacher do to teach care, and provide the opportunities for caring, that can create community and diminish the effects of classroom bullying?

*Ways to Foster Community and Caring:
Sense of Self, Modeling Behavior and Community Service*

Based loosely on the teachings of Noddings (2002), one of the teachers articulates what she feels is their “challenge to care and expect their children to care about themselves, each other, the environment, and the world.” The teachers’ papers articulate three central ways to teach community and caring: first, through giving students school-based opportunities through which they learn to care about themselves; second, through the teachers’ own modeling of caring behavior for others; and third, through providing students with opportunities to engage in community service, both within and outside the classroom, so as to demonstrate care for the community.

Caring for Self: Getting Engaged in School

One teacher notes that “an important component to eliminating power struggle and fostering a sense of community [is] an affirmation of the sense of self. Students who have good esteem for themselves can also have good esteem for others” – and will then be less likely to bully those others or be bullied by them. Teachers gave some suggestions for schools to encourage that “sense of self” – all involving students being engaged in school, and connecting that work in school to what lies ahead for them thereafter. The music teacher, not surprisingly, believes that extra-curricular activities are key to students’ feeling good about themselves:

Many extra-curricular activities and electives such as the arts and athletics should be kept in the schools to help students find something in their life at which they feel superior... Too many times, it is the extra-curricular activities that get cut from the schools when the schools aren’t performing as they should academically,

but I think that is one of the worst things that can be done. If you take out the classes where students feel successful in order to focus on the classes where students are unsuccessful, there will be no motivation for students to even want to come to school!

Another teacher advocates setting up situations where a student needs to collaborate with others as a way of getting them excited about learning and fully involved in school:

“When given the chance to collaborate with one another...[students] will inevitably build a community of learners, placing value on education and finding excitement in learning.”

A third contends that teaching a child about what lies ahead in his or her future creates the opportunity for that child to feel engaged and fully present in school today; he believes “in teaching the whole child, part of that is informing the students about their possibilities and potential challenges for the future.” Providing students the chance, within the school setting, to be successful, challenged, and optimistic for the future would help them “establish and maintain a positive sense of self;” by allowing them the chance to feel powerful in their own right, the temptation to exert power over others through bullying and the susceptibility to being bullied by others recede.

Caring for Others: Teachers Modeling Caring Behavior

Many of the teachers concur that students can learn to exercise caring behavior towards their peers by emulating teachers who themselves demonstrate the same kind of caring conduct towards others. “Development of the student populations’ interpersonal relationships with a school’s community members as modeled by its teachers and staff members” would result in “decreased behaviors of bullying,” in the view of one teacher. Another teacher argues that “good role models and a staff that works together is going to create the kind of climate that students need to stay away from bullying.”

Based upon her own recent experiences, a relatively new elementary school teacher contends that “care can be taught explicitly through modeling care, dialoguing with students on why care is important, letting them practice care, and allowing them to establish and maintain a positive sense of self.” She believes that she, as their teacher and one of the central adult figures in their lives, has to give and model care for them: “in the case of some of my students, I am literally the only contact to care they have all day. I am their only model of how to care for another person.” She has conscientiously practiced using “purposeful talk to model care to my students.....teaching so as to avoid the authoritarian mode.” She feels that she has made headway:

I have been modeling care since the beginning of the year and have watched my roughest bullies turn into caring individuals who no longer prey on their victims but instead protect and watch over them. They fight for the opportunity to sit by or read to the three [special education] students integrated into the classroom, run to each other when one is crying, and stick up for each other, even to me sometimes! I couldn't be more proud of the progress some of them have made.

One novice teacher, while not disagreeing with the notion that teachers can serve as prime role models for caring behavior, is not certain that teachers have been properly trained for the task. She advocates for teacher training to “involve modeling and role-playing, for I do not feel our staff has received this type of instruction for what we [should] be implementing in our classrooms.” Another teacher agrees that any program to reduce bullying should train “staff to model healthy, non-threatening and non-aggressive relationships with students and colleagues.”

Teachers should also be trained to facilitate two other elements that could contribute to and support teachers' modeling appropriate and caring behavior for students: consistent rules and increased supervision. One teacher observes that, in her school, anti-bullying rules (and consequences for violating such rules) seem inconsistent

from classroom to classroom – as individual teachers modify those rules to meet their own classroom management strategies – and that “it can be very confusing for students to move from classroom to classroom and have a completely different set of expectations from each teacher.” Where possible, the rules against bullying behaviors should be either student-generated or developed with student input, because “students should take ownership in developing their own rules against bullying;” but wherever the class rules come from, they should be “clearly-stated” and consistent, and include “immediate consequences for violating any classroom rules.” So that the rules can be a vehicle for adult modeling of caring and concerned behavior, however, those rules should “*not* include harsh punishment,” but rather, impose more community-oriented consequences such as “acknowledgment of behavior from offender, opportunity of victim to confront his offender;...discussion about the incident with the teacher and the ...group;” ongoing communication with parents, etc. For these kinds of rules and consequences to be supportive rather than subversive of community in the classroom, “a more effective training for staff *and* students” is both necessary and appropriate.

Teachers and other staff providing better supervision in the areas of the school (hallways, cafeterias, playgrounds, restrooms) where bullying incidents tend to occur would also support teachers’ efforts to demonstrate their caring for others. Nothing connotes lack of teacher caring more than a student being bullied in the playground or hallway and having no adult come to his or her rescue. As one teacher notes, “the majority of bullying goes on in the schools in some place or time when there is no supervision.” Another points out that “it is those times when students are least supervised when students will show whether they have a ‘pro-bully’ or ‘anti-bully’

attitude.” Accordingly, one teacher recommends that any anti-bullying effort include “increased adult supervision in the cafeteria, hallways, bathrooms, playground, and other areas where most bullying behavior occurs.”

Caring for Community: Opportunities for Community Service

Going beyond the spheres of caring for self and caring for others, the notion of care “can be expanded to include...care for the environment, for animals, and for plants, in an effort to give children a more global outlook, one that would include a concern for the common good regardless of power rankings.” A number of the teachers strongly advocate for generous doses of community service – both service within the classroom and school as well as in the community in which the school is situated – as a way of deflating in-school power inequities and removing one of the preconditions to bullying taking place.

Suggestions for community service within the school include student council (“a great way for students to get involved in the community and take responsibility for their school...a positive activity that keeps students from having the time or desire to bully others”); programs integrating students (such as “special education and life skills classrooms”) into the general classrooms, or pairing older and younger students “in the form of tutoring, mentoring, or helping around the school” (bringing “a mutual respect and feeling of community to everyone involved,” and helping “to keep the school relationships from becoming disrespectful and prevent[ing] bullying”), and school-wide projects like recycling bottles and cans or other “deliberately planned opportunities in the school [such as] special events, peer mentoring programs, and volunteer requirements.”

Such in-school community service opportunities not only help build school community, but they set up situations

where students are required to interact amongst peers they do not normally associate with. By taking them out of their cliques, they will be forced to rely on themselves and not the comfort established in their friendship circles. This way they might be able to better interact with other students without the fear of being judged or pressured by their peers, thus creating a greater sense of independence from some of the culture that helps to perpetuate circumstances of bullying.

An even more profound pushing of students beyond their in-school comfort zones of cliques and power struggles can be achieved outside the school's walls. A middle school teacher, who has observed that students tend to have fixed notions of who "has the power... because no one has told them or shown them otherwise," sees this as a "clear indication" that

we need to be exposing our students to the world outside of [their immediate surroundings], making them feel uncomfortable and vulnerable in an environment that is not their own...Exposing our students to the surrounding community outside of the classroom in an effort to create experiences where the students become dependent on working together as a collaborative community to address an issue or reach a goal is a significantly large undertaking for teachers and staff, but it is completely necessary for the purpose of bringing our students together rather than seeing themselves in a hierarchy of separate entities.

Other teachers concur with the wisdom of out-of-school community service projects, sponsored by the school, as a mechanism for taking a child out of the fixed power inequities present in the classroom, exposing him or her to larger world experiences, and connecting him or her both with the smaller school community and with community members in the larger world beyond. A school "could have community members come visit and also provide field trip experiences that establish emotional connections thus beginning the development...of interpersonal relationships with community members." Schools could

allow teachers to get outside their classrooms at least one time per week to engage their students in a community based project. These projects could be as simple as picking up trash in a local park, to serving meals at a soup kitchen, or to going outside and doing team building exercises...

One teacher believes that it is in “real world experiences” such as these that “the student’s understanding of the community is validated.” She continues:

If students are given the opportunity to travel outside the classroom with their classmates they can see the real world community and how their personal role in society has value. The outings can be as simple as walking through an open space to pick up trash so that students can feel a sense of responsibility and pride in one’s work to improve the community. These outings allow the students to be a part of their small community while interacting and contributing to the large community. As students have these experiences together, they find the commonality between one another, creating a balanced and safe relationship.

The ultimate “goal is to bring students together and teach them to work towards achievement both as an individual *and* as a community.” Another teacher believes that the connection between this kind of real world community service and lessening school bullying is profound:

[B]ullying does not occur in a vacuum, and students lives are not limited to the school setting. Providing the opportunity for students to get outside their comfort zone, and get experience in the real world doing meaningful projects, would be the most practical and helpful approach to end bullying.

*Ways to Subvert Community and Caring:
Unsupportive Administrations and “Bullying in a Box”*

Two approaches to addressing bullying are seen as particularly unhelpful by this group of teachers: the first is that of school administrations who, while mouthing anti-bullying sentiments, in fact fail to support teachers, parents and victims trying to grapple with bullying; and the second is school district or administration-imposed mini-curricula designed to combat bullying (denominated by the teachers as “bullying in a box” or “bullying in a binder”).

Unsupportive Administrations

The teachers believe that administrative buy-in to addressing the issues of power, isolation, and lack of community/caring pervading school bullying is crucial:

The environment and overall philosophy of a school should reflect goals of working together, leadership, and mentorship. In order for this sort of school climate to be developed, the whole administration and staff of a school need to be aware of such philosophy and ultimate goals.

Despite the urgency of this need for administration support, at least three of the teachers stress their observations of or experiences with school principals ignoring or sweeping bullying problems under the proverbial rug. One teacher references newspaper articles about Columbine, and how the principal of that school was reported to have repeatedly discounted students' concerns about bullying within the high school. Another noted a school administration's tendency to "just expel a student for bullying, because they have high numbers at the school and they can afford simply to move the problem somewhere else." She emphasizes "That does not solve the problem" – it only allows the administration to avoid its consequences for the moment.

A third teacher feels strongly that some school administrations and districts are more interested in protecting their reputations as "safe schools" than in addressing real bullying incidents as they happen. In his experience,

[the main] shortcoming of my district's bullying policy was that often times when parents and teachers presented a bullying incident to the administration, quite often the incident was lessened or denied, so as to protect the school's reputation instead of addressing the occurrence.

Based upon this kind of administration behavior, he poses a pressing question: "how can we as educators, parents and students protect our students when schools themselves are

non-responsive to keeping our children safe, because protecting their own reputation is more important?”

“Bullying in a Box”

During the course of the seminar, one middle school teacher speaks of a “binder” containing a structured anti-bullying curriculum that she was given at the beginning of her first teaching year. She describes how she was supposed to “check off” each week that she had delivered one of the anti-bullying lessons in that binder. Another elementary school teacher notes that at the beginning of his school year, someone delivered to his room a “box” of anti-bullying materials for him to review and teach. Periodically, someone asks if he has taught anything in the box; he conceded that, months after the start of the year, he had not yet opened the box. “Bullying in a box” becomes a catchphrase within the class for one kind of anti-bullying approach adopted by many school districts and administrations, and some the teachers expand upon their experiences with and the advisability of using this approach in their papers.

The first teacher who mentioned “bullying in a binder” recounts receiving her binder:

Within the first two weeks of the beginning of the school year, I met with our District Prevention Specialist to receive my white binder containing the bullying proofing lessons I was required to teach. Not only was it a requirement, but I was expected to follow the lesson plan for each session and record the dates I completed those lessons with my students.

At first, she felt good about it: “My initial reaction to the binder was positive because I felt like I was receiving support and help as a new teacher.” After a while, however, her impression began to change: “As I began teaching the binder...I was easily frustrated with the manner in which the curriculum was separated from our district’s underlying

curriculum.” Teaching anti-bullying as a discrete entity, separate and apart from everything else that was going on in the classroom and school, seems unrealistic and ineffective to her, as she observes

I understand that the consequences for bullying are listed in the district handbook, but in a culture where bullying is so pervasive in the homes of our students, they need... to be taught about creating a safe, caring community [rather than just] using a binder.

Other teachers agree with her conclusions. One says “I believe that creating a program that is ‘real’ and not just in a box or a book, is the best practice.” Another stresses “incorporating bullying information into your curriculum. Make the curriculum eye-opening and worthy of discussion, instead of a rote lesson to meet school policy.” A third believes that “many boxed anti-bullying curriculums neglect” important and necessary components, such as “eliminating power struggle...fostering a sense of community...[and] an affirmation of the sense of self.” In her view, a true and effective anti-bullying effort “cannot be bought in a boxed set, but instead needs to be an inherent part of the class environment and truly one of the teacher himself or herself.”

One of the teachers emphasizes the difficulties for a teacher who tries to use a school administration’s boxed anti-bullying approach:

efforts created with good intent like “bullying in a box” or “bullying in a binder” are seldom utilized. These preventive measures are distributed and skimmed, never to be revisited. With such approaches, teachers are not provided with any support, are isolated and solely responsible for the bullying behavior of students.

In essence, these teachers are citing administration-compelled “bullying in a box” strategies as another instance of lack of administrative support for their efforts. These approaches exacerbate teachers’ isolation and sense of helplessness, and work against

developing any sense of community, caring, and shared experience – which the teachers agree are crucial to combating bullying at its core.

Chapter Five – Discussion

Implications of the Three Studies and Recommendations

This research into the impacts of bullying is comprised of three separate, but interrelated studies: (a) a quantitative study of over 1000 6th grade students in eight middle schools in an economically and ethnically diverse school district; (b) a qualitative, retrospective study of eight young adults – some successful, high-achieving students, and some incarcerated – who were bullied in grade school; and (c) a qualitative study of the observations and opinions of eleven teachers, based upon the papers they authored for a graduate-level seminar about school bullying. To conclude this report, what follows is, first, a summary of the overall findings from these studies, and second, a discussion of the implications of these findings, articulated in the form of recommendations for further steps that might help schools better ameliorate the ill effects of the bullying occurring on their grounds.

What We Have Learned: Summary and Discussion of the Studies

Quantitative Study: School Engagement Mediates Between Being a Victim and Being a Truant

The underlying premise of the quantitative study was that school truancy serves as a gateway to numerous negative outcomes for today's youth: dropping out of school, engaging in criminal activity, and the like. Our conversations with youth in a truancy diversion program (see Appendix B) posited some sort of connection between students being truant, and their experiencing victimization or bullying from their peers in school. The existing research literature suggested that such a connection may be less than direct – it could be difficult to establish that bullying somehow directly “causes” truancy – but

that an indirect connection, mediated by one or more other factors, might be shown to exist. A short-term longitudinal study was undertaken, in which 1000 students were surveyed in the fall and the spring of their 6th grade year. Two sets of questions were asked: one set pertaining to whether the students were engaged in school (behaviorally, cognitively, and emotionally), and a second set pertaining to whether students were subject to actions by their peers that fall within the definition of bullying. Using structural equation modeling, the data collected were analyzed to determine the connections, if any, between being victimized, being engaged in school, and the outcomes reflected in school records of attendance and achievement (measured by grade point average).

What was learned from this analyzed data set was this: while bullying does not directly relate to truancy or to school achievement, a statistically significant relationship can be shown where mediated by the factor of school engagement. In other words, being bullied may not be a direct cause of truancy or school achievement. If, however, bullying results in the victim becoming less engaged in school, that victim is more likely to cease attending and achieving; if the victim can remain or become engaged in school, his or her attendance and achievement are less likely to suffer.

If, as the quantitative study appears to show, school engagement acts as a kind of a buffer between being bullied and being truant, what has to happen for that engagement to occur? What does school engagement actually mean, under these circumstances? Why do some students manage to be engaged in school, and then thrive after bullying, while others cannot seem to get the hang of it, and self-destruct?

Qualitative Study: Schools Doing What They Should Mitigates Bullying Effects

The qualitative study delved more deeply into what it is that keeps bullied students engaged in school and away from succumbing to negative outcomes such as truancy and criminal activity. A retrospective study was employed, using extreme sampling techniques: one group of young, high-achieving advanced placement (AP) students in a suburban high school and a second group of young men incarcerated for a variety of crimes were surveyed to determine whether they had been bullied by their peers in grade school. Those with the highest cumulative scores on the bullying scale from each group were interviewed in depth about their having been bullied, their experiences with school generally, and what they perceive as having brought them to this particular point in their lives. The interview protocol was designed and the interview transcripts were analyzed using three different conceptual frameworks: the dimensions of the school itself (*e.g.*, its curriculum and pedagogy, structure, community, administration, and overall intentions/aims), the relationships between school and society (in particular, the bullying observed by the study participants to occur in society), and the interplay between public and private concerns in bullying situations (specifically, the public school's difficulties grappling with bullying as it arises within largely private relationships between and among its students).

What we learned from the rich and moving stories told by these young people breaks down into two categories: what schools currently do that helps and hurts bullied students, and what schools could (and, we suggest, should) give to victimized students that they deeply need. Schools help bullied kids by challenging them, through engaging academic and/or extracurricular activities; and by providing them with caring adults who

support them and model positive behavior. Schools hurt bullied kids by changing the school structure (in the move from elementary school to middle school) so as to distance the students from caring adults, effective supervision, and differentiated and interactive pedagogy focused on individual student needs; by failing to intervene in bullying (or to assist or support its victims) early on when it first occurs; and by making victims feel even more isolated from the rest of the school community and from the future consequences of their actions. Also emerging from the interview data were three things that bullied students need from their schools (and that schools can and should provide): first, a place of refuge and belonging (where they can feel both safe, appreciated, and challenged in a constructive way); second, responsible adults who can support and sustain them, and provide them examples of appropriate behavior to follow; and third, a sense of future possibilities beyond the immediate dangers from the bullying that surrounds them, so as to persuade them that staying in school despite those dangers promises better things to come.

In other words, schools doing what they actually should be doing, as schools – providing a safe and succoring learning environment, adults who show they care, and a path to a productive adulthood – allows bullied students to overcome bullying’s ill effects. What the students generally agreed does not work to help them survive their victimization intact are superficial anti-bullying programs, engrafted on to existing curricula almost as an after-thought, which might afford lip service to school districts’ responsibilities for addressing bullying concerns, but are usually ineffective and viewed by students as “tedious” or “lame.”

The above-described findings led these researchers to want to hear from another group besides the students who suffer bullying: the adults to whom the victims look to support and sustain them in the school setting. An opportunity arose to obtain insights from teachers who deal with bullied students, and a third, smaller study resulted.

The Teacher Study: Curing Bullying through Caring and Community

During the course of putting this report together, one of its authors taught a graduate seminar to masters and doctoral students on Bullying and Qualitative Research. The students were all teachers at various levels in K-12 classrooms. At the end of the seminar, the teacher/graduate students were assigned to submit short papers proposing either an intervention plan or a research design addressing bullying within their schools. Their papers turned out to be a rich source of data on these teachers observations and opinions about how bullying should be (and often is not being) handled in their schools' classrooms, cafeterias and corridors.

The strand of the standard bullying definition relating to power imbalances deeply resonated with these teachers; to them, the power inequities in the school setting, which observed by students in the outside world of family and friends and then emulated in the classroom, are key to bullying being sustained. The sense of isolation that many students feel at school only increases their vulnerability to bullying by their more powerful peers.

The antidote to problems of power and isolation, in the view of these teachers, is found in fostering a sense of community in school. To create community, teachers advocated the teaching of caring. First, students should be taught how to care for themselves; to accomplish this, the teachers argued for engaging kids in the stuff of school – school work, extra-curricular activities, and planning for a productive future so

that students can be fully engaged with their whole selves in their present. Second, students should be taught how to care for others. The best ways for this to occur are through teachers modeling caring behavior, and offering school-based opportunities for students to mentor other students. Finally, students should be taught how to care for their community. Community service projects, both inside and outside the school itself, provide an excellent path for teaching students how to care for the world around them. An added benefit from such projects is that they often remove students, albeit briefly, from existing, classroom-based power relationships into new unfamiliar environments where all students feel vulnerable, and in which mutually supportive collaborations can ensue allowing bullies and victims alike to see themselves and their classmates in a new light.

The teachers described two ways in which caring and community-building are frustrated. The first involved school administrators who “sweep bullying under the rug” – ignoring it or downplaying its significance – in order to maintain reputations or to avoid confrontations. The second involved what the teachers denominated “bullying-in-a-box” or “bullying-in-a-binder:” the attempts by school districts and administrations to address bullying issues by handing teachers some pre-fab anti-bullying curriculum (in a box or a binder) and directing them to teach its components in addition to the regular curriculum. The teachers viewed these types of anti-bullying interventions as a distracting and ineffective substitute for substantive administration/district support for what is really needed to combat bullying: a caring school community in which individual students are meaningfully challenged and supported by the adults around them and each other.

What We Can Do About What We Have Learned: Study Implications and Suggestions

The implications from the above-described studies can best be understood when contrasted with a recently published report, prepared for the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, entitled “Effectiveness of Programmes to Reduce School Bullying: A Systematic Review” (Ttofi, Farrington & Baldry, 2008). This meta-analytical report reviewed evaluations of 59 school-based anti-bullying programs in various countries, including the United States. The only evaluations included in the study were those “comparing an experimental group who received the intervention with a control group who did not” (p. 6). It also excluded evaluations relying on measures other than student self-reports, largely of their perceptions of the level of bullying before and after the program interventions took place (or, with control groups, of their perceptions of the level of bullying at two points in time).

The report found that “overall, school-based anti-bullying programmes are effective in reducing bullying and victimization” (p. 6), and that the following program elements were most important (pp. 6-7):

- parent training
- information for parents
- school conferences
- disciplinary methods
- improved playground supervision
- classroom rules
- classroom management
- cooperative group work
- work with peers
- videos

The report found that “the programmes worked better with older children” (p. 7) and recommended that anti-bullying programs should therefore “be targeted on children aged eleven or older, rather than on younger children” (p. 72). The report also cautioned that

such programs “were less effective in the USA” than in other countries studied (such as Sweden and Norway).

Essentially, the Swedish report argues for discrete programs (such that effects can be cleanly tested), parental involvement, a focus on older children (from whom reliable self-reports are more easily obtained than from younger children), and an emphasis on rules, discipline, and supervision. When these elements are operative, bullying numbers go down in a palpably measurable way.

How do the Swedish report findings connect, if at all, to the findings described in this report?

The Swedish report operates off of an assumption – shared by many in the field of bullying prevention and in the social sciences generally – that a problem can be most effectively programmatically addressed where its parameters can be cleanly measured and where experimental and control comparisons are clear; the merits of a program can only be established if the operable factors and variances can be sufficiently narrowed so that they can be crisply measured; and a program failing to meet such strict conditions is probably suspect. Thus, the important design “elements” of the different school-based programs covered in the Swedish report focused heavily on management, rules, supervision, parental training and conferences, the showing of videos, and the self-reports of older children: all things that can be crisply measured with little muss or fuss.

From our studies we have learned, instead, that bullying may be a messy thing, not crisp or easily limited at all.

It is not that the learning from the three studies comprising this report wholly negate the Swedish findings. Although few of our study participants thought to mention

it, obviously parental involvement is a good thing. Increased supervision, improved classroom management and more even-handed discipline were referenced by students and teachers alike as necessary school improvements. But bullying itself, however, rooted as it is in the power inequities of our society and the out-of-school experiences and observations of every child attending school, is not as simply and easily eradicated through discrete and measurable school-based programs as the Swedish report might suggest. If one of the reasons that we care about school bullying is its ultimate outcomes – not just whether raw bullying numbers decrease, but whether the ever-present victims of bullying go on to college or to crime – then we must look beyond narrow programs that produce statistically significant numbers, and toward broader (and, unfortunately, less easily measurable) efforts striking at the heart of the victimization experience of these students. What can a child who is repeatedly and severely harassed by others do to overcome this experience in order to continue to attend school, graduate, and ultimately thrive? If a school cannot eliminate bullying altogether – and even the “best” programs in the Swedish report are associated with a decrease in victimization of 23% at most (Ttofi et al., 2008, p. 7), leaving 77% of the bullying presumably in place – what can the schools do to help and support that victimized child?

Based upon the findings of the three studies of this report, we make the following recommendations:

1. Focus on engagement.

Our quantitative study demonstrated a significant association between victimization, on the one hand, and school attendance and achievement, on the other, when mediated by the victim’s engagement in school. In other words, bullied children

who are engaged in school are more likely to continue attending class, and are more likely to achieve when they are there. That being the case, if our schools wish to stave off the truly negative effects of bullying – including truancy and the dropping out and other societal unacceptable behaviors often following in truancy’s wake – then a focus on improving school engagement may be key. Our qualitative studies with young adults and teachers indicated that *challenging academics, school-based extra-curricular activities, involved and understanding teachers and coaches, and a focus on the future possibilities ensuing from staying in school* combined to keep victimized children engaged in their education. In the absence of these elements, the dangers of the hallways and the playgrounds, and the immediate need for self-protection, outweighed any need or desire even to show up for class much less persevere until graduation. We recommend that schools, and their administrations and districts, redouble their efforts to reach each child through heightened focus on their primary educational mission – and thereby help the bullied children in their midst become productive adults.

2. Model caring behavior.

Our young people observe and experience adults abusing their power over others at every turn. These are the examples of human relations that populate students’ lives outside the school setting: in their parents’ workplaces, in the relationships between and among their parents and siblings, in video games, on TV and in the movies. School, however, provides a more controlled environment when children might observe and experience something else – caring adults who may have a power advantage over the young people for whom they are responsible, but who can exercise that power in a non-abusive, caring, mentoring, helping way. Teachers, administrators, and other responsible

adults in the school setting can and should model the kind of caring behavior that students may not see elsewhere, and demonstrate that leadership, not abuse, is the appropriate way to use superior power in constructive ways. School adults do not necessarily know how to do this – after all, it appears that most adults in society do not know how. Accordingly, we recommend that *teacher and administrator training* in how to model appropriate caring and leadership behavior be developed and made a part of teacher and principal licensure programs and continuing professional development curricula.

3. Offer mentoring programs.

Of the students interviewed for this study, those who felt that they had one or more specific school adults to whom to turn – even when they were in the throes of the worst bullying – tended to do well; when those individuals either did not exist or disappeared, the paths of the victimized children took a downward turn. The students looked elsewhere for mentorship or support. Gangs became the most viable option for some. Refuge in groups of supportive but socially non-constructive friends or “cousins” was the option for others. To stave off this kind of self-help, schools need to offer specific *mentoring programs* for every child. Each student should know the specific adult in school to whom he or she can go for support and sustenance, regardless of the issue, and that person should be open and available. (A school counselor with a student load of 200 or more – often the case in urban high schools – cannot effectively provide the needed mentorship.) We recommend that schools make mentorship of specific students part of the job description of every adult working in the school setting.

We also recommend that students be given opportunities to mentor and lead other students, as a way of their being able to practice being in a position of strength, and using that strength in caring, productive and enriching ways. Many of the incarcerated young men interviewed for the qualitative study found that mentoring or supporting someone else – a daughter, a younger brother, a grandmother in need, other students in danger of being sucked in the gang world – helped buoy them up, feel confident, and worthwhile. Such opportunities can occur in the classroom, in cooperative learning situations, or as part of the community service programs discussed below.

4. Provide opportunities for community service, in and out of school.

Community service provides an optimum venue for mentoring to occur. Within school, teaming students from older grades with younger grades, or students in the regular program with those with disabilities or who are in special education, creates a real life opportunity for students to exercise leadership and caring in the face of inequities of skill, ability, age, and power. Other kinds of community service both within the school (such as school clean-up, landscaping or recycling programs) and outside (working with social service, environmental, and other community organizations) allow students to break out of established hierarchical student relationships within the classroom, demonstrate new strengths, collaborate, mentor others, and show leadership in ways that the classroom does not afford. The participants in our teachers study agreed that community service is an exemplary way to decrease bullying and/or its negative effects among students. We recommend that schools take the initiative to *involve students in community service both in and out of school* as an integral part of building school community and counteracting the isolation and pain of bullying.

5. Re-examine the shift from elementary to middle school.

For the young people interviewed in our study, the transition from elementary to middle school was not positive. They lost a bond to their single classroom teacher; their class sizes ballooned, such that establishing individual relationships with subject matter teachers grew more difficult; the pedagogy became more lecture and test-based and less interactive; and more time was spent in hallways and other unsupervised places. The opportunities for isolation, alienation, and disengagement increased mightily, and any school-based havens from being bullied seemed to fall away. We recommend that schools seriously explore the possibility of eliminating or at least facilitating this difficult transition, through, for example, *creating K-8 schools* or other *transition programs* so as better to acclimate students to this abrupt and unhelpful shift in their educational environments.

6. Start early, with the young ones.

The Swedish report (Ttofi et al., 2008) cited at the start of this section admonished its readers to target older children with their anti-bullying programs, because the study demonstrated that existing programs targeting older students are associated with a larger decrease in bullying and victimization than programs from younger children. This is understandable, given the type of experimental study designs that were used. Specific numbers of bullying incidents are more susceptible to being acknowledged and self-reported by older students – since nascent bullying relationships among younger students have had the time and opportunity to crystallize and grow, and older students may be more self-aware and able to recognize bullying when it occurs – and, in the absence of earlier intervention, a more substantial body of bullying behavior may have been

inadvertently allowed to thrive in the older students' worlds. More bullying incidents means more chances for a statistically significant decrease therein to be measured after interventions occur.

We strongly advocate that schools do *not* take the Swedish report's findings as evidence of a need to limit anti-bullying efforts to older students. The students and incarcerated youth interviewed here all experienced traumatic victimizing behavior in school when they were very young. In retrospect, they knew that it was bullying; at the time, they could not have told anyone that it was bullying, they just thought that they were weak, worthless, somehow at fault, and always at risk. Our young man who started bringing weapons to school and joined a gang at the age of eight (and was shot in the head at age ten) to protect himself from and find support against being bullied would have been completely missed by an anti-bullying program aimed at "older children." Our young AP student musician pled for early intervention in bullying before significant damage is done:

When they see it happening in 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th grade, even in 5th grade they need to stop it otherwise it will just keep going and evolve into something more dangerous...They need to catch it then and try to stop it or they're going to like ruin someone's life.

The teachers agreed with this sentiment. The early elementary teachers pointed out the effectiveness of mentoring activities (between regular and special education students) even for the very young in increasing collaborative and reducing abusive relationships among classmates.

It needs to be reiterated, as stated at the start of this report, that the particular school events triggering interest in anti-bullying efforts grew out of school shootings (such as Columbine) and suicides. Events of this sort would never even show up as

statistically significant in any quantitative study of school bullying. While anti-bullying programs with smart videos and precise classroom rules might yield what appear to be more significant strides in reducing bullying among older children whose bullying behavior has had more time to grow and develop, that measurably greater impact tells only a narrow slice of the story about school bullying. Statistical studies should not be used to support “more bang for the buck” practices with older students only to ignore what might be more profound and long-lasting effects of intervening in bullying when children are very young. We recommend that schools direct resources towards *recognizing and intervening in school bullying in the early grades*, and, since it is often difficult to distinguish between bullying and just horsing around at this early stage, towards *teacher and administrator training* in how to recognize the difference and how to handle incidents when they occur.

7. Resist the temptation of “bullying-in-a-box.”

Finally, the temptation to try to find a quick fix to satisfy obligations under anti-bullying policies and laws is clearly rampant. Too many teachers tell stories of boxes or binders of anti-bullying materials being thrust upon them by busy administrators and districts trying to take care of bullying with the stroke of a pen (or copy machine, or video player). These stop-gap programs welded atop of existing curricula are uniformly derided by students and teachers alike, and we strongly recommend against them. Our studies show that the worst of bullying outcomes can be avoided or at least reduced by sincerely engaging students in the real work of school – that is, their education: by providing them challenging work to do, by giving them adults who support them and model caring behavior, and by pointing the way to the possibilities of productive

adulthood. We recommend that schools pursue these types of broad but fruitful efforts in earnest.

References

- Asher, S. R., & Coie, J. D. (Eds.). (1990). *Peer Rejection in Childhood*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Bellmore, A. D., Witkow, M. R., Graham, S., & Juvonen, J. (2004). Beyond the individual: The impact of ethnic context and classroom behavioral norms on victims' adjustment. *Developmental Psychology, 40*(6), 1159-1172.
- Beran, T. N. (2009). Correlates of peer victimization and achievement: An exploratory model. *Psychology in the Schools, 46*(4), 348-361.
- Beran, T. N., Hughes, G., & Lupart, J. (2008). A model of achievement and bullying: Analyses of the Canadian National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth. *Educational Research, 50*(1), 25-39.
- Beran, T. N., & Lupart, J. (2009). The relationship between school achievement and peer harassment in Canadian adolescents: The importance of mediating factors. *School Psychology International, 30*(1), 75-91.
- Bhat, C. S. (2008). Cyber bullying: Overview and strategies for school counsellors, guidance officers, and all school personnel. *Australian Journal of Guidance & Counseling, 18*(1), 53-66.
- Boivin, M., & Hymel, S. (1997). Peer experiences and social self-perceptions: A sequential model. *Developmental Psychology, 33*(1), 135-145.
- Boivin, M., Hymel, S., & Hodges, E. V. E. (2001). Toward a process view of peer rejection and harassment. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 265-289). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Boulton, M. J., Trueman, M., & Murray, L. (2008). Associations between peer victimization, fear of future victimization and disrupted concentration on class work among junior school pupils. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 78*(3), 473-489.
- Bowles, C., & Lesperance, L. (2004). Being bullied in adolescence: A phenomenological study. *Guidance & Counseling, 19*(3), 94-102.
- Bradshaw, C. P., Sawyer, A. L., & O'Brennan, L. M. (2007). Bullying and peer victimization at school: Perceptual differences between students and school staff. *School Psychology Review, 36*(3), 361-382.
- Buhs, E. S. (2005). Peer rejection, negative peer treatment, and school adjustment: Self-concept and classroom engagement as mediating processes. *Journal of School Psychology, 43*(5), 407-424.
- Buhs, E. S., & Ladd, G. W. (2001). Peer rejection as an antecedent of young children's school adjustment: An examination of mediating processes. *Developmental Psychology, 37*(4), 550-560.
- Buhs, E. S., Ladd, G. W., & Herald, S. L. (2006). Peer exclusion and victimization: Processes that mediate the relation between peer group rejection and children's classroom engagement and achievement? *Journal of Educational Psychology, 98*(1), 1-13.
- Craig, W. M., Pepler, D., & Atlas, R. (2000). Observations of bullying in the playground and in the classroom. *School Psychology International, 21*(1), 22-36.

- Crecente, B. D. (2006, May 24). Gamer was on deadly road: Creator of download says Columbine was wake-up call. *Rocky Mountain News*, pp. 4A, 12A.
- Crick, N. R., Nelson, D. A., Morales, J. R., Cullerton-Sen, C., Casa, J. F., & Hickman, S. E. (2001). Relational victimization in childhood and adolescence: I hurt you through the grapevine. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 196-214). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Crothers, L. M., & Kolbert, J. B. (2004). Comparing middle school teachers' and students' views on bullying and anti-bullying interventions. *Journal of School Violence*, 3(1), 17-32.
- Crothers, L. M., & Kolbert, J. B. (2008). Tackling a problematic behavior management issue: Teachers' intervention in childhood bullying problems. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, 43(3), 132-139.
- Davidson, L. M., & Demaray, M. K. (2007). Social support as a moderator between victimization and internalizing-externalizing distress from bullying. *School Psychology Review*, 36(3), 383-405.
- Dhami, M. K., Hoglund, W. L., Leadbeater, B. J., & Boone, E. M. (2005). Gender-linked risks for peer physical and relational victimization in the context of school-level poverty in first grade. *Social Development*, 14(3), 532-549.
- Dijkstra, J. K., Lindenberg, S., & Veenstra, R. (2008). Beyond the class norm: Bullying behavior of popular adolescents and its relation to peer acceptance and rejection. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology*, 36(8), 1289-1299.
- Duncan, R. D. (1999). Maltreatment by parents and peers: The relationship between child abuse, bully victimization, and psychological distress. *Child Maltreatment*, 4(1), 45-55.
- Elinoff, M. J., Chafouleas, S. M., & Sassu, K. A. (2004). Bullying: Considerations for defining and intervening in school settings. *Psychology in the Schools*, 41(8), 887-897.
- Ellis, A. A., & Shute, R. (2007). Teacher responses to bullying in relation to moral orientation and seriousness of bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 77(3), 649-663.
- Espelage, D. L., & Asidao, C. S. (2001). Conversations with middle school students about bullying and victimization: Should we be concerned? *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, 2, 49-62.
- Espelage, D. L., Bosworth, K., & Simon, T. R. (2000). Examining the social context of bullying behaviors in early adolescence. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 78, 326-333.
- Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (2003). Research on school bullying and victimization: What have we learned and where do we go from here? *School Psychology Review*, 32(3), 365-383.
- Espelage, D. L., & Swearer, S. M. (Eds.). (2004). *Bullying in American schools: A social-ecological perspective on prevention and intervention*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Finnegan, R. A., Hodges, E. V. E., & Perry, D. G. (1998). Victimization by peers: Associations with children's reports of mother-child interaction. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 75(4), 1076-1086.

- Flook, L., Repetti, R. L., & Ullman, J. B. (2005). Classroom social experiences as predictors of academic performance. *Developmental Psychology, 41*(2), 319-327.
- Fonagy, P., Twemlow, S. W., Vernberg, E., Sacco, F. C., & Little, T. D. (2005). Creating a peaceful school learning environment: the impact of an antibullying program on educational attainment in elementary schools. *Med Sci Monit, 11*(7), CR317-325.
- Franek, M. (2005-2006). Foiling cyberbullies in the new wild west. *Educational Leadership, 63*(4), 39-43.
- Fredricks, J. A., Blumenfeld, P. C., & Paris, A. H. (2004). School engagement: Potential of the concept, state of the evidence. *Review of Educational Research, 74*(1), 59-109.
- Frisen, A., Holmqvist, K., & Oscarsson, D. (2008). 13-year olds' perception of bullying: Definitions, reasons for victimization and experience of adults' response. *Educational Studies, 34*(2), 105-117.
- Gillespie, A. A. (2006). Cyber-bullying and harassment of teenagers: The legal response. *Journal of Social Welfare & Family Law, 28*(2), 123-136.
- Graham, S. (2006). Peer victimization in school: Exploring the ethnic context. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 15*(6), 317-321.
- Graham, S., Bellmore, A. D., & Mize, J. (2006a). Peer victimization, aggression and their co-occurrence in middle school: Pathways to adjustment problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 34*(3), 363-378.
- Graham, S., Bellmore, A. D., & Mize, J. (2006b). Peer victimization, aggression, and their co-occurrence in middle school: Pathways to adjustment problems. *Journal of Abnormal Child Psychology, 34*(3), 349-364.
- Graham, S., & Juvonen, J. (1998). Self-blame and peer victimization in middle school: An attributional analysis. *Developmental Psychology, 34*(3), 587-599.
- Graham, S., & Juvonen, J. (2001). An attributional approach to peer victimization. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 49-72). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Graham, S., & Juvonen, J. (2002). Ethnicity, peer harassment, and adjustment in middle school: An exploratory study. *Journal of Early Adolescence, 22*(2), 173-199.
- Griffin, R. S., & Gross, A. M. (2004). Childhood bullying: Current empirical findings and future directions for research. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9*(2004), 379-400.
- Hamarus, P., & Kaikkonen, P. (2008). School bullying as a creator of pupil peer pressure. *Educational Research, 50*(4), 333-345.
- Hawker, D. S. J., & Boulton, M. J. (2000). Twenty years' research on peer victimization and psychosocial maladjustment: A meta-analytic review of cross-sectional studies. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, 41*(4), 441-455.
- Hinduja, S., & Patchin, J. W. (2008). Cyberbullying: An exploratory analysis of factors related to offending and victimization. *Deviant Behavior, 29*(2), 129-156.
- Hoglund, W. L. (2007). School functioning in early adolescence: Gender-linked responses to peer victimization. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 99*(4), 683-699.
- Hoglund, W. L., & Leadbeater, B. J. (2007). Managing threat: Do social-cognitive processes mediate the link between peer victimization and adjustment problems in early adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence, 17*(3), 525-540.

- Hunt, C. (2007). The effect of an education program on attitudes and beliefs about bullying and bullying behaviour in junior secondary school students. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health, 12*(1), 21-26.
- Jacobsen, K., & Bauman, S. (2007). Bullying in schools: school counselors' responses to three types of bullying incidents. *Professional School Counseling, 11*(1), 1-9.
- James, D., Lawlor, M., Courtney, P., Flynn, A., Henry, B., & Murphy, N. (2008). Bullying behaviour in secondary schools: what roles do teachers play? *Child Abuse Review, 17*(3), 160-173.
- Jenson, J., & Dieterich, W. (2007). Effects of a skills-based prevention program on bullying and bully victimization among elementary school children. *Prevention Science, 8*(4), 285-298.
- Jones, S. E., Haslam, S. A., York, L., & Ryan, M. K. (2008). Rotten apple or rotten barrel? Social identity and children's responses to bullying. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 26*(1), 117-132.
- Juvonen, J., & Gross, E. F. (2008). Extending the school grounds? -- Bullying experiences in cyberspace. *Journal of School Health, 78*(9), 496-505.
- Juvonen, J., Nishina, A., & Graham, S. (2000). Peer harassment, psychological adjustment, and school functioning in early adolescence. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 92*(2), 345-359.
- Juvonen, J., Nishina, A., & Graham, S. (2001). Self-views versus peer perceptions of victim status among early adolescents. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school; The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 105-124). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Kabel, M. (2006). 5 Kan. students arrested in alleged plot: 5 Kansas students face charges in alleged school shooting plot on Columbine anniversary. Retrieved April 24, 2006, from <http://abcnews.go.com>
- Klomek, A. B., Kleinman, M., Schonfeld, I. S., & Gould, M. S. (2008). Peer victimization, depression, and suicidality in adolescents. *Suicide & Life-Threatening Behavior, 38*(2), 166-180.
- Kochenderfer-Ladd, B., & Skinner, K. (2002). Children's coping strategies: Moderators of the effects of peer victimization? *Developmental Psychology, 38*(2), 267-278.
- Kochenderfer, B. J., & Ladd, G. W. (1996). Peer victimization: Cause or consequence of school maladjustment? *Child Development, 67*, 1305-1317.
- Kokkinos, C. M., & Panayiotou, G. (2004). Predicting bullying and victimization among early adolescents: Associations with disruptive behavior disorders. *Aggressive Behavior, 30*, 520-533.
- Ladd, B. K., & Ladd, G. W. (2001). Variations in peer victimization: Relations to children's maladjustment. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 25-48). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Ladd, G. W., & Kochenderfer-Ladd, B. (2002). Identifying victims of peer aggression from early to middle childhood: Analysis of cross-informant data for concordance, estimation of relational adjustment, prevalence of victimization, and characteristics of identified victims. *Psychological Assessment, 14*(1), 74-96.

- Ladd, G. W., Kochenderfer, B. J., & Coleman, C. C. (1997). Classroom peer acceptance, friendship, and victimization: Distinct relational systems that contribute uniquely to children's school adjustment? *Child Development, 68*(6), 1181-1197.
- Lamarche, V., Brendgen, M., Boivin, M., Vitaro, F., & Perusse, D. (2006). Do friendships and sibling relationships provide protection against peer victimization in a similar way? *Social Development, 15*(3), 373-393.
- Lane, D. A. (1989). Violent histories: Bullying and Criminality. In D. P. Tattum & D. A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in schools* (pp. 95-105). Stoke-on-Trent, England: Trentham Books.
- Langdon, S. W., & Preble, W. (2008). The relationship between levels of perceived respect and bullying in 5th through 12th graders. *Adolescence, 43*(171), 485-503.
- Leadbeater, B. J., Hoglund, W. L., & Woods, T. (2003). Changing contexts? The effects of a primary prevention program on classroom levels of peer relational and physical victimization. *Journal of Community Psychology, 31*(4), 397-418.
- Lee, J. J. (2006). Alaska school vows security after arrests: Students encouraged to return to Alaska middle school after 6 arrested in alleged plot. Retrieved April 24, 2006, from <http://abcnews.go.com>
- Lodge, J., & Feldman, S. S. (2007). Avoidant coping as a mediator between appearance-related victimization and self-esteem in young Australian adolescents. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology, 25*(4), 633-642.
- Marachi, R., Astor, R., & Benbenishty, R. (2007a). Effects of student participation and teacher support on victimization in Israeli schools: An examination of gender, culture, and school type. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence, 36*(2), 225-240.
- Marachi, R., Astor, R., & Benbenishty, R. (2007b). Effects of teacher avoidance of school policies on student victimization. *School Psychology International, 28*(4), 501-518.
- Messick, S. (1995). Validity of psychological assessment: Validation of inferences from persons' responses and performances as scientific inquiry into score meaning. *American Psychologist, 50*(9), 741-749.
- Meyer-Adams, N., & Conner, B. T. (2008). School violence: Bullying behaviors and the psychosocial school environment in middle schools. *Children & Schools, 30*(4), 211-221.
- Mishna, F. (2004). A qualitative study of bullying from multiple perspectives. *Children & Schools, 26*(4), 234-247.
- Mishna, F., & Alaggia, R. (2005). Weighing the risks: A child's decision to disclose peer victimization. *Children & Schools, 27*(4), 217-226.
- Nansel, T. R., Overpeck, M., Pilla, R. S., Ruan, W. J., Simons-Morton, B., & Scheidt, P. (2001). Bullying behaviors among US youth: Prevalence and association with psychosocial adjustment. *Journal of the American Medical Association, 285*(16), 2094-2100.
- Nation, M., Vieno, A., Perkins, D. D., & Santinello, M. (2008). Bullying in school and adolescent sense of empowerment: An analysis of relationships with parents, friends, and teachers. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 18*(3), 211-232.

- Nylund, K., Nishina, A., Bellmore, A. D., & Graham, S. (2007). Subtypes, severity, and structural stability of peer victimization: What does latent class analysis say? *Child Development, 78*(6), 1706-1722.
- O'Moore, M., & Kirkham, C. (2001). Self-esteem and its relationship to bullying behavior. *Aggressive Behavior, 27*, 269-283.
- Oliver, C., & Candappa, M. (2007). Bullying and the politics of "telling". *Oxford Review of Education, 33*(1), 71-86.
- Olweus, D. (1993). *Bullying at school*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.
- Olweus, D. (1995). Bullying or peer abuse at school: Facts and intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 4*(6), 196-200.
- Olweus, D. (2001). Peer harassment: A critical analysis and some important issues. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 3-20). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Olweus, D. (2003). A profile of bullying at school. *Educational Leadership, 60*(6), 12-17.
- Pellegrini, A. D. (2001). Sampling instances of victimization in middle school: A methodological comparison. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and victimized* (pp. 125-144). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Pepler, D. J., Craig, W. M., Connolly, J. A., Yulie, A., McMaster, L., & Jiang, D. (2006). A developmental perspective on bullying. *Aggressive Behavior, 32*(4), 376-384.
- Perry, D. G., Sara J, K., & Perry, L. C. (1988). Victims of peer aggression. *Developmental Psychology, 24*(6), 807-814.
- Peterson, J. S., & Ray, K. E. (2006a). Bullying among the gifted: The subjective experience. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 50*(3), 252-269.
- Peterson, J. S., & Ray, K. E. (2006b). Bullying and the gifted: victims, perpetrators, prevalence, and effects. *Gifted Child Quarterly, 50*(2), 148-168.
- Raskauskas, J., & Stoltz, A. D. (2007). Involvement in traditional and electronic bullying among adolescents. *Developmental Psychology, 43*(3), 564-575.
- Reid, K. (1989). Bullying and persistent school absenteeism. In D. P. Tattum & D. A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in schools* (pp. 89-94). Stoke-on-Trent, England: Trentham Books.
- Reid, K. (2005). The causes, views and traits of school absenteeism and truancy: An analytical review. *Research in Education*(74), 59-82.
- Rigby, K. (2004). Addressing bullying in schools: Theoretical perspectives and their implications. *School Psychology International, 25*(3), 287-300.
- Rigby, K. (2005). Why do some children bully at school? The contributions of negative attitudes towards victims and the perceived expectations of friends, parents and teachers. *School Psychology International, 26*(2), 147-161.
- Rigby, K. (2006). Implications of bullying in schools for aggression between nations. *Journal of Peace Education, 3*(2), 175-185.
- Rigby, K., Smith, P. K., & Pepler, D. (2004). Working to prevent school bullying: Key issues. In P. K. Smith, D. Pepler & K. Rigby (Eds.), *Bullying in schools: How successful can interventions be?* (pp. 1-12). Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.

- Roland, E., & Galloway, D. (2004). Professional cultures in schools with high and low rates of bullying. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 15(3-4), 241-260.
- Salmivalli, C. (2001). Group view on victimization: Empirical findings and their implications. In J. Juvonen & S. Graham (Eds.), *Peer harassment in school: The plight of the vulnerable and the victimized* (pp. 398-419). New York: The Guilford Press.
- Salmivalli, C., Kaukiainen, A., & Voeten, M. (2005). Anti-bullying intervention: Implementation and outcome. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 75, 465-487.
- Salmivalli, C., & Voeten, M. (2004). Connections between attitudes, group norms, and behaviour in bullying situations. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, 28(3), 246-258.
- Schafer, M., Korn, S., Smith, P. K., Hunter, S. C., Mora-Merchan, J. A., Singer, M. M., et al. (2004). Lonely in the crowd: Recollections of bullying. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 22, 379-394.
- Schwartz, D., Gorman, A. H., Nakamoto, J., & Toblin, R. L. (2005). Victimization in the peer group and children's academic functioning. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 97(3), 425-435.
- Seals, D., & Young, J. (2003). Bullying and victimization: prevalence and relationship to gender, grade level, ethnicity, self-esteem, and depression. *Adolescence*, 38(152), 735-747.
- Smith, P. K. (1997). Bullying in life-span perspective: What can studies of school bullying and workplace bullying learn from each other? *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 249-255.
- Smith, P. K. (2004). Bullying: Recent developments. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 9(3), 98-103.
- Smith, P. K., & Brain, P. (2000). Bullying in schools: Lessons from two decades of research. *Aggressive Behavior*, 26, 1-9.
- Smith, P. K., Cowie, H., Olafsson, R. F., & Liefoghe, A. P. D. (2002). Definitions of bullying: A comparison of terms used, and age and gender differences, in a fourteen-country international comparison. *Child Development*, 73(4), 1119-1133.
- Smith, P. K., Pepler, D., & Rigby, K. (Eds.). (2004a). *Bullying in schools: How successful can interventions be?* Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press.
- Smith, P. K., Talamelli, L., Cowie, H., Naylor, P., & Chauhan, P. (2004b). Profiles of non-victims, escaped victims, continuing victims and new victims of school bullying. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 74, 565-581.
- Smokowski, P. R., & Kopasz, K. H. (2005). Bullying in school: An overview of types, effects, family characteristics, and intervention strategies. *Children & Schools*, 27(2), 101-110.
- Solberg, M. E., & Olweus, D. (2003). Prevalence estimation of school bullying with the Olweus Bully/Victim Questionnaire. *Aggressive Behavior*, 29(3), 239-268.
- Stephenson, P., & Smith, D. (1989). Bullying in the junior school. In D. P. Tattum & D. A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in schools* (pp. 45-57). Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books.
- Tattum, D. P. (1989). Violence and aggression in schools. In D. P. Tattum & D. A. Lane (Eds.), *Bullying in schools* (pp. 7-19). Stoke-on-Trent, England: Trentham Books.

- Terasahjo, T., & Salmivalli, C. (2003). "She is not actually bullied." The discourse of harassment in student groups. *Aggressive Behavior*, 29, 134–154.
- Terranova, A. M., Morris, A. S., & Boxer, P. (2008). Fear reactivity and effortful control in overt and relational bullying: a six-month longitudinal study. *Aggressive Behavior*, 34(1), 104-115.
- Townsend, L., Flisher, A. J., Chikobvu, P., Lombard, C., & King, G. (2008). The relationship between bullying behaviours and high school dropout in Cape Town, South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 38(1), 21-32.
- Unnever, J. D. (2005). Bullies, aggressive victims, and victims: Are they distinct groups? *Aggressive Behavior*, 31, 153–171.
- Vaillancourt, T., Hymel, S., & McDougall, P. (2003). Bullying is power: Implications for school-based intervention strategies. In M. J. Elias & J. E. Zins (Eds.), *Bullying, peer harassment, and victimization in the schools: The next generation of prevention* (pp. 157-176). New York: The Haworth Press, Inc.
- Vossekuil, B., Fein, R. A., Reddy, M., Borum, R., & Modzeleski, W. (2002). *The final report and findings of the safe school initiative: Implications for the prevention of school attacks in the United States*. Washington, D.C.: United States Secret Service & United States Department of Education.
- Whitted, K. S., & Dupper, D. R. (2005). Best practices for preventing or reducing bullying in schools. *Children & Schools*, 27(3), 167-175.
- Wolke, D., Woods, S., Stanford, K., & Schulz, H. (2001). Bullying and victimization of primary school children in England and Germany: Prevalence and school factors. *British Journal of Psychology*, 92(4), 673-696.
- Woods, S., & Wolke, D. (2003). Does the content of anti-bullying policies inform us about the prevalence of direct and relational bullying behaviour in primary schools? *Educational Psychology*, 23(4), 381-401.
- You, S., Furlong, M. J., Felix, E., Sharkey, J. D., Tanigawa, D., & Green, J. G. (2008). Relations among school connectedness, hope, life satisfaction, and bully victimization. *Psychology in the Schools*, 45(5), 446-460.

The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) is an initiative of Colorado Foundation for Families and Children (CFFC). NCSE strives to build a network of key stakeholders who share the belief that improving school attendance and school attachment promotes achievement and school success.



NCSE was established as a result of more than a decade of educational research conducted by CFFC about youth out of the educational mainstream. The impact of this work has been the development of significant investments of state funds to reduce suspensions, expulsions and truancy. Over five years ago, CFFC began working with the OJJDP, US Department of Justice to assist in the planning and implementation of pilot demonstration projects across the country. As projects developed, CFFC became the national evaluator of this five-year truancy demonstration project.

The culmination of ten years of program experience and research has identified truancy and school engagement as the centerpiece of NCSE's work to improve outcomes for youth who are at the greatest risk of school failure and delinquency. We are national leaders in applying research to help communities prevent and reduce truancy.

Authors:

Ken Seeley, EdD

Martin L. Tombari, PhD

Laurie J. Bennett, JD, PhD

Jason B. Dunkle, PhD

National Center for School Engagement
c/o The Partnership for Families & Children
450 Lincoln Street, Suite 100
Denver, CO 80203
(303) 837-8466
www.schoolengagement.org